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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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BENGALURU SEES RAPE OF 2 GIRLS IN 5 DAYS

A cop and another man were arrested for minor's rape

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

Bengaluru, India's Silicon Valley, is grappling with a wave of sexual assault cases involving minors, sparking concern over the City's safety. Two separate incidents in the past five days, coupled with a recent gang rape in Koramangala on 21 February, have shaken the City.

A police constable and another man were arrested on Friday for allegedly sexually assaulting a 17-year-old girl in Bommanahalli.

According to the complaint, the accused— was a married man—and stayed in the neighbourhood befriended the victim last year. After several meetings, he reportedly formed a close relationship and later got intimate with the promise of marriage.

Eventually, the girl confided in her mother about the relationship, prompting her to file a complaint.

Constable Arun, initially tasked with the investigation, is accused of raping the victim. Under the guise of offering her a job, he lured her to a hotel in BTM Layout in December 2024, where he allegedly drugged and raped her. He then threatened her with the release of private videos if she spoke out. The case initially registered at Mico Layout police station, was transferred to Bommanahalli following a thorough inquiry. Both suspects have been arrested and remanded to Parappana Agrahara Central Prison.

In another case, HAL police have launched a search for a security guard accused of raping a 17-year-old student on 19 February after luring her to an isolated location in the area.

According to the complaint filed by the victim's mother, the girl, a Class 10 student residing within the HAL police station limits, was approached by the security guard in the neighbourhood, who allegedly gained her trust before persuading her to accompany him to a secluded spot. There, he reportedly raped her before fleeing.

The police have registered a case under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and are searching for the absconding accused.

—Salar News

PHOTO: FREEPIK

- According to the complaint, the girl, a Class 10 student, was approached by the security guard in the neighbourhood, who allegedly gained her trust before persuading her to accompany him to a secluded spot.

J'khand: 3 girls gangraped, 18 boys held

The Jharkhand Police arrested 18 minors for allegedly raping three minor tribal girls in Khunti district, Jharkhand. Khunti SP Aman Kumar said the incident took place late on Friday when five girls were returning home after attending a wedding ceremony. Three of them – aged 12-16 years – were gangraped by the boys returning from the same ceremony. The accused, aged 12-17 years, were sent to a juvenile home, and the girls will undergo a medical examination. Police immediately set up a team and arrested all the 18 accused, he said.

—PTI with agencies

Pigs, vultures: Yogi attacks Kumbh management critics

LUCKNOW, 24 FEB

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took a jibe at the opposition over their criticism of the arrangements for the ongoing Maha Kumbh, saying people found what they were looking for. "Vultures got only dead bodies. Pigs got dirt. Devotees got God. It means that everyone has seen and felt things according to their nature and character," he said targeting the Samajwadi Party (SP) and other opposition parties. Adityanath further accused former chief minister Akhilesh Yadav of "playing with faith" in reference to Mohammad Azam Khan overseeing the 2013 Kumbh mela. "Anybody with good intentions should go to Kumbh, but whoever goes with ill intentions will definitely suffer," he added. *—PTI*

BBMP imposes meat ban for Mahashivratri

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) announced a complete ban on animal slaughter and the sale of meat within its jurisdiction on the occasion of Mahashivratri. BBMP stated that the ban will be in effect on 26 February. All slaughterhouses and meat shops in Bengaluru will remain closed for the day. BBMP routinely imposes such restrictions on religious occasions, including Gandhi Jayanthi and other major Hindu festivals.

—Salar News

BJP promises guided tour of Sheesh Mahal

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Delhi Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh Verma said the BJP will take reporters on a "guided tour" inside "Sheesh Mahal". He was referring to the 6, Flagstaff Road residence in north Delhi where Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal lived when he was chief minister. BJP-led Delhi government is set to table 14 pending reports, including the report on 'Sheesh Mahal,' in the Delhi Assembly on 25 February. The audit has reportedly uncovered large-scale irregularities in the project's planning, tendering and execution. *—PTI*

Buses suspended for day 3 between K'taka, M'rashtra

BELAGAVI, 24 FEB

Tensions between Karnataka and Maharashtra have led to the suspension of public bus services between the two states for the third consecutive day on Monday. Rajesh Huddar, Divisional Controller of NWKSRTC, confirmed that bus operations were suspended from Saturday. On Sunday, a Karnataka Airavat bus was defaced in Solapur. The Kannada words on the bus were painted black, saffron flags were tied to it, and "Jai Maharashtra" was written on the vehicle. Fortunately, no harm came to the bus crew. Services are expected to remain suspended on Tuesday, due to further unrest. Pro-Kannada organisation Karnataka Rakshana Vedike (KRV) has organised a 'Belagavi Chalo' rally in Balekundri. *—Salar News*

PM WOOS BIHAR

Modi releases ₹22K cr under PM Kisan

BHAGALPUR, 24 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday released the 19th instalment of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme under which Rs 22,000 crore was transferred to the bank accounts of 9.8 crore farmers across the country.

The PM-KISAN scheme is a central sector scheme launched in February 2019 by the PM to supplement the financial needs of land-holding farmers.

Eligible farmers will receive Rs 2,000 as part of the Rs 6,000 annual benefit, distributed in three instalments.

At an event in Bihar's Bhagalpur district, Modi announced that a new highway from Munger to Bhagalpur to Mirza Chauki, costing approximately Rs 5,000 crore, is being constructed.

The PM also launched several development projects for the state.

Modi said the NDA government was promoting animal husbandry to increase the income of landless and small farmers.

He also highlighted the success of the 'Lakhpati Didis' in villages and so far, around 1.25 crore Lakhpati Didis were created across the country, including thousands of Jeevika Didis in Bihar.

Modi mentioned that the Centre of Excellence in Motihari will help develop superior indigenous cattle breeds. Additionally, the milk plant in Barauni will benefit 3 lakh farmers in the region, he added.

Modi highlighted that it is now time for Bihar's Makhana (fox nut) to enter the global market.

"Bihar is set to become a major centre for the food processing industry in Eastern India. The National Institute of Food Technology and Entrepreneurship will soon be set up in Bihar. Additionally, three new Centres of Excellence in agriculture will be established in the state," he said. *—PTI*

IMA victims to get compensation soon

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda on Monday assured the victims of the IMA ponzi scheme that they will receive their due compensation 10 days before the Ramzan festival.

A discussion was held on Monday at the Vikas Soudha office regarding the total amount involved in the IMA scam, the value of movable and immovable assets seized so far, the amount refunded to victims over the past seven years, and the timeline and method for compensating the remaining victims, a statement issued by the Minister's office said.

According to the statement, over 1 lakh depositors invested Rs 3,213.58 crore in IMA in hopes of doubling their money, but they were defrauded.

"The total number of depositors was 69,069.... Rs 1,400 crore had been returned as dividends from time to time. After the scam came to light, Rs 19.12 crore from the company's accounts was distributed to 6,858 victims at Rs 50,000 per person in April 2022," the statement read. It further said that on 8 November, 2023, Rs 66.66 crore was credited to 53,142 victims' accounts, on 23 May, 2024, Rs 1.28 crore was credited to 626 victims' accounts and on 7 November, 2024, Rs 36.14 lakh was credited to 276 accounts.

"In total, Rs 87.43 crore has been credited to the accounts of 60,902 victims," it explained.

The government has already seized more than 10 properties linked to IMA, with movable assets valued at Rs 106.92 crore and immovable assets estimated at Rs 401.92 crore.

It further said that additionally, Rs 2.88 crore was seized from various company bank accounts, along with Rs 11.72 crore in cash and Rs 11.06 crore in investment certificates, bringing the total seized amount to Rs 534.5 crore.

Following the High Court's directive these assets will soon be auctioned, and the proceeds will be distributed to investors, said the statement. Promising high returns, IMA operator Mohammed Mansoor Khan had allegedly duped over a lakh investors, mostly Muslims. The case came to light when Khan fled to Dubai, leaving behind a video message, saying that he was committing suicide because of "corruption in the state and central governments". Khan was arrested on 21 July on his arrival in New Delhi by the Enforcement Directorate and is currently in judicial custody.

Before fleeing the country, Khan had even accused the then Shivajinagar MLA R Roshan Baig of taking Rs 400 crore from him and not returning it. *—PTI*

3 YEARS OF WAR

World leaders including Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy honour fallen soldiers at Independence Square in Kyiv, marking the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine. Reportedly, 43,000 Ukrainian and 1,98,000 Russian soldiers had been killed in the war. UK also issued the largest sanctions package against Moscow, targeting the country's military producers in third countries – including a firm in India ***PHOTO: PTI >>>More on Pages 5 & 6***

Trouble for AAP in Punjab? Cong says 32 MLAs to switch sides soon

CHANDIGARH, 24 FEB

Punjab Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa Monday claimed that 32 AAP MLAs were in touch with him to switch sides. Hitting back, the ruling AAP's state unit president Aman Arora claimed that it was Bajwa who has made an "advance booking" to join the BJP.

Speaking to reporters outside the Punjab Assembly, Bajwa also claimed that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was in touch with the BJP. "When (Arvind) Kejriwal decides to remove him, he (Mann) will pack his bags and join them (BJP)," he claimed.

The leader of the opposition in the state assembly asserted that in his 45 years of political experience, he has never made any wrong statement. "We had earlier said the Congress does not have any intention to topple this (AAP) government," he said.

"I am saying this again 32 MLAs are in touch with me. Not only MLAs, but even ministers are in touch with me. Aman Arora is also aware of this matter," claimed Bajwa.

"They (AAP MLAs) all know that this is their last term. They are looking for new parties to get tickets. I am in touch with them (32 MLAs). We will see who is to be brought in, who is likely to win the polls and who is not. It will happen at an appropriate time." *—PTI*

6 K'TAKA RESIDENTS RETURNING FROM KUMBH DIE IN MP

BELAGAVI, 24 FEB

Six people from Gokak taluk in Belagavi were killed and two others critically injured when their speeding jeep hit a private bus in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur on Monday while they were returning from Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj, officials said.

Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Roshan, said the deceased are Balachandra Goudar, 50; Sunil Shedbal, 45; Basavaraj Kurti, 63, Basavaraj Dodmal, 49; Iranna Shebinkatti, 27 and Veerupaksh Gumati, 61. The injured are Mushtak Shindikurabet and Sadashiva Upadalli.

They had left from Gokak for Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh on 22 February, according to police.

The accident took place near Pahreva village under Khitoula police station limits.

The jeep driver lost control over the wheels.

As a result, the vehicle first hit a tree on the road divider, then jumped over to the other side of a highway and hit a bus coming from the opposite direction.

Earlier, five people from a twelve-member group from Bidar town, also traveling in a jeep, were killed in an accident on 20 February.

—Salar News

FAR-RIGHT MAKES BIG GAINS

Conservatives humble Olaf's party, win German polls

CDU

The Conservatives won Germany's Parliament election, while the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) doubled its support, marking its strongest result since World War II. The outcome comes amid concerns over the Trump administration's shift towards Russia, affecting the transatlantic alliance.

Who will be the next chancellor?

Friedrich Merz of the CDU is set to become the next Chancellor of Germany. He has ruled out a coalition with the AfD. He has a firm stance against anti-immigration and will make stricter border control rules.

HERE IS ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT IT

Which party won how many seats?

1.	Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU)	208
2.	Alternative for Germany (AfD)	152
3.	Social Democratic Party (SDP)	120
4.	Greens	85
5.	Die Linke	64
6.	Bundnis Sahra Wagenknecht	1

Ties with US

- Merz's top priority is to "unify Europe" against US and Russia.
- US VP JD Vance and Elon Musk supported AfD.
- Germany is the most populous country in the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO.
- It is Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier after the US.
- Merz said he was not sure that NATO would exist in its "current form" by June next year.
- He pitched for forming an independent European defence alliance. ***>>>More on Pages 5 & 6***

INDIA, UK TALK ON VISAS, MUM ON IMMIGRATION

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Resumed talks on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and UK will include talks on business visas but not on immigration.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal highlighted the need for greater business mobility but said that immigrations has never been discussed in FTA meetings.

If India and UK want to expand trade and investment, "we need to be faster and more liberal in our issuance of visas", Goyal said. Alongside UK's secretary of state for business and trade Jonathan Reynolds, Goyal said the FTA aims to triple bilateral trade. *—Salar News*

Stray dog mauls drunk labourer to death in City

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

A 22-year-old construction worker died in a suspected stray dog attack near the OMR Circle under the Gangamma Gudi police station limits on Sunday evening. Police said that they are awaiting an autopsy report to ascertain the real cause of death. The deceased, identified as Nagaraju from Raichur, was employed at a construction site in Abbigere and lived in a temporary shelter near the under-construction building. According to sources, the incident occurred when an inebriated Nagaraju was walking towards the OMR Circle and a pack of stray dogs attacked him. In his attempt to escape, he lost balance and fell into an open drain. The dogs then fatally mauled him, sources said. The police, however, said it was unclear whether the cause of death was the dog attack or injuries sustained from the fall. "We are waiting for the autopsy report to determine the exact cause of death," an investigating officer said. The Gangamma Gudi police have registered a case and are probing the matter further. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: ANI

Andhra man murdered in Yelahanka

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

A 23-year-old laundryman was murdered in Yelahanka on Sunday night. Police are investigating the case and are searching for the gang allegedly responsible for the crime. The deceased, Subramani, from Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, was attacked around 9pm. According to CCTV footage, a group of individuals was seen assaulting him with a sharp weapon. Preliminary investigations reveal that Subramani was looking for someone in the locality before being surrounded and attacked by the group. The motive behind the murder remains unclear, and police are working to establish the reason for the confrontation. *—Salar News*

Man dead in Bidar accident

BIDAR, 24 FEB

A 58-year-old man died in an accident in Aurad Taluk on National Highway 161A, due to a head-on collision between a Tata vehicle and a bike. The deceased Neelakanthrao Bhosale from Santapur village is survived by his wife, daughter, and two sons. He was traveling from Bidar to Santapur on his bike when a Tata Travel vehicle coming from Aurad collided with him, resulting in his instant death. The incident took place within the jurisdiction of Santapur police station. *—Salar News*

DC, ZP CEO inspect State-run hospitals

MYSURU, 24 FEB

Deputy Commissioner G Lakshmikanth Reddy and new Zilla Panchayat Chief Executive Officer S Ukeshkumar Ukeshkumar who took charge from outgoing KM Gayathri on Monday paid surprise visits to KR hospital and District Hospital in the city and inspected the infrastructure, facilities and care provided to the patients. Sources said the duo also listened to the grievances of both doctors and other hospital staff. After inspecting the wards, the officers advised the staff to maintain cleanliness and ensure that patients visiting the hospitals receive proper care and treatment. *—Salar News*

Minister backs assaulted conductor in border dispute

Parameshwara urges further language issues be avoided

BELAGAVI, 24 FEB

- The Minister expressed dissatisfaction over the police action. The attack on has once again reignited the decades-old border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy on Monday expressed his support for bus conductor Mahadevappa Hukkeri, who was allegedly assaulted in Belagavi for not speaking Marathi.

He stated that his department and the people of the state stand by Hukkeri.

According to Hukkeri, the incident occurred on Friday when a young man and girl boarded the bus. When he asked for their tickets, the boy responded in Marathi.

Upon informing them that he did not understand Marathi and asked them to respond in Kannada, the boy immediately called his friends and attacked him and the driver.

Based on a complaint, five people have been arrested. The girl, who is a minor, also lodged a police complaint alleging that Hukkeri behaved with her indecently. The Minister expressed dissatisfaction over the police action in the case. The attack on the bus conductor has once again reignited the decades-old border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka.

There have been attacks on bus drivers and conductors of the state road transport corporations of Maharashtra and Karnataka. Belagavi has a substantial Marathi population and a section among them often demands that this border district be merged with Maharashtra Speaking to reporters in Tumakuru, state Home Minister G Parameshwara urged the Maharashtra government to action against those involved in such incidents. "Often disputes take place on linguistic basis in Belagavi at the Maharashtra border. We have to tread with care. This applies to Maharashtra and Karnataka because we should not allow this to grow further," he said. *—PTI*

Ramalinga Reddy
PHOTO: PTI

Panel moots splitting of BBMP into 7 segments

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

A joint committee of the Karnataka Legislature has recommended the restructuring of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) into seven smaller corporations to enhance administrative efficiency.

The committee, led by Congress MLA Rizwan Arshad, submitted its comprehensive report on the Greater Bengaluru Governance Bill, 2024, to Assembly Speaker UT Khader on Monday. The report suggests forming the Greater Bengaluru Authority to improve coordination among key agencies like BESCOM, BWSSB and Namma Metro. Under the proposal, the Chief Minister would chair the authority, with the Bengaluru in-charge minister serving as the vice-chair.

Arshad highlighted dissatisfaction with the BBMP's current administration and underscored the need for decentralised governance. The proposal envisions each new corporation comprising 100 to 125 wards, with a 30-month mayoral term. The divisions are likely to follow existing zones – Central, South, East and West Bengaluru – without merging neighbouring districts. Villages near corporation limits may be included under the Karnataka Municipal Corporations Act. The committee urged the government to complete ward delimitation by 30 June and hold the elections in July. It also recommended the allocation of government funds for the new corporations. With the 877 sqkmBengaluru city's population exceeding 1.5, the reforms have become urgent, Arshad said. *—Salar News*

State heading for bankruptcy due to guarantees, says BJP

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

BJP State President BY Vijayendra on Monday alleged that Karnataka is heading towards bankruptcy as it has no money to clear the outstanding debts of the transport department and the energy department due to the two major guarantees.

"Karnataka is moving towards complete bankruptcy. The government does not have the money to pay salaries to government employees on time," Vijayendra alleged in the letter to the Chief Minister.

Of the five pre-poll guarantees, Shakti offers free ride to Karnataka women in non-luxury buses across the state and free electricity up to 200 units to the household connections under 'Gruha Jyoti' scheme.

BY Vijayendra
PHOTO: ANI

The other three guarantees are 'Gruha Lakshmi' that promises Rs 2,000 per month to women head of the BPL families, 10 kg rice to each member of the BPL family every month under Anna Bhagya scheme and Rs 3,000 to graduates and Rs 1,500 to diploma holders every month under 'Yuva Nidhi' scheme for those who cleared the exam in 2023-24 and onwards for two years.

As Siddaramaiah is set to present his 16th budget on 7 March, BJP state president shot an open letter to him.

"The transport department has an outstanding debt of Rs 7,000 crore. It is being reported that all the Electricity Supply Companies (ESCOMs) in the state are reaching a pitiable state due to non-payment of electricity bills," he stated. He urged the Chief Minister to issue a white paper on the financial situation of the state in this regard. *—PTI*

AFTER COURT ORDERS

Mysuru chalo protest held peacefully

MYSURU, 24 FEB

The Mysuru Chalo protest, organized by the Rashtra Suraksha Janandolan Samithi, a right-wing organization supported by the BJP, was held peacefully at Maharaja College grounds (Football grounds) in the city, following High Court directions.

The court had permitted the protest to be conducted from 3 pm to 5 pm, but it concluded within 45 minutes, marked by the conspicuous absence of prominent state BJP leaders such as R. Ashoka and BY Vijayendra.

During the protest, State BJP Vice President N Mahesh condemned the state government's alleged appeasement politics for not taking strict action against those involved in the Udayagiri stone-pelting incident.

Although the police have filed an FIR naming around 1,000 individuals, only 23 arrests have been made so far. Mahesh urged the police to arrest all those involved in the incident.

Rashtra Suraksha Janandolan Samithi Convener K.T. Ullas accused PFI activists of involvement in the Udayagiri violence. Meanwhile, MLA Srivatsa alleged that Muslim youths attacked the Udayagiri Police Station in DJ Halli, Bengaluru. *—Salar News*

Mandya: 2 die by suicide over debt

MYSURU, 24 FEB

Three people of a family died suicide by consuming poison and later jumping into VC canal near Yeliyuru in Mandya taluk on Monday due to debt burden. According to the police, the deceased are Masthappa, 65, his wife Rathnamma, 48, and their daughter Lakshmi, 18. He had borrowed Rs three lakh from the lenders. Police recovered two bodies, while the search for the third is ongoing, as it is suspected to have been washed away. *—Salar News*

NURSES ON STRIKE

Members of Karnataka State Contract Nurses Employees Welfare Association protest against the government for various demands at Freedom Park, in Bengaluru on Monday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

'Lokayukta's MUDA report echoes Govt'

MYSURU, 24 FEB

HD Kumaraswamy, Siddharamaiah

PHOTOS: ANI

Union Minister HD Kumaraswamy on Monday alleged that the Lokayukta police prepared its inquiry report on 14 alternative sites allotted to Chief Minister Siddharamaiah's wife Parvathi according to directions of the government.

Speaking to reporters in Mysuru, Kumaraswamy also announced that the NMDC and KIOCL will be merged to protect the jobs of KIOCL employees.

On Udayagiri violence, the minister urged both Congress and BJP to stop indulging in appeasement politics to protect their vote banks and take stern and unbiased action against those behind the violence. "Police must act tough on elements involved in disturbing harmony and peace in the society. Why do the government want to protect people who even came prepared with bags of stones to pelt in the 10 February incident at Udayagiri Police station?" he asked.

Kumaraswamy also flayed the state government for increasing the metro fare to fund its guarantee schemes. "I am ready to give Rs 10,000 to the woman head of a family by increasing such fares. State government must focus on introducing memorable schemes to people," he said.

The minister also hailed the presentation of a Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman focused on the welfare of farmers, women, the middle class and youths. The Union government has granted Rs 1.72 lakh crore for the promotion of agriculture, Rs 12 lakh crore allocated for capital expenditures out of Rs 50 lakh crore budget outlay for the 2024-25 fiscal. *—Salar News*

32 more ATS stns planned in State

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

To modernise and increase transparency in vehicle fitness checks, the transport department is planning to set up a number of automated testing stations (ATSs) across the state. In November 2024, the department inaugurated the first such station in Nelamangala.

Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy said the centres will be on the Public Private Partnership model. "The automatic vehicle testing centres are being set up on the design, build, finance, operate and transfer model at 32 places where land is available. These include Devanahalli, Tumakuru, Kolar, Shivamogga, Davangere, Belagavi, Gadag, Ranebennur, Bagalkot, Vijayapura, Ballari, Bidar and Yadgir," he said. *—Salar News*

HSRP deadline extended

The transport department extended the deadline for installing High-Security Registration Plates to 31 March. This is the seventh extension. The previous deadline was 31 January.

BBMP TYPIST FOUND DEAD IN CITY, SUICIDE SUSPECTED

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

A 34-year-old typist employed with the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) was found dead under mysterious circumstances at her residence in Chamarajpet on Sunday evening.

The deceased, Nandini, lived with her husband Srikant and their two children on 1st Main Road, Chamarajpet. According to police, the incident occurred while Srikant was away. On his return, he found Nandini hanging from a wall hook with a saree. She was rushed to a nearby hospital, where she was declared brought dead.

Investigators suspect depression could be a factor, but the exact cause is yet to be determined. The Chamarajpet police have registered a case and are exploring all possible angles, including personal and professional factors.

(Suicide is not the solution. Help is available. Please call Tele Manas at 14416 or SAHAI at 080-25497777 for support.)

—Salar News

ACCUSED OF NEGLIGENCE

Cloth left inside Kalaburagi woman after C-Section

KALABURAGI, 24 FEB

An incident at the Gulbarga Institute of Medical Sciences (GIMS) led to severe discomfort for Bhagyashree, a 22-year-old from Badadal, after a cotton cloth was allegedly left inside her abdomen following a C-section on 5 February.

Despite seeking treatment in Solapur and Akkalkot, her pain persisted. Bhagyashree's brother Jagadish Mashala told **Salar News** that later an X-ray revealed the cloth inside her stomach. It was later removed at Karajagi Primary Health Centrre. Her family has accused GIMS of negligence and claimed that officials denied responsibility and refused to release her medical records.

The hospital said gauze was used to control bleeding and the family failed to return for its scheduled removal, leading to complications
PHOTO: SALAR

The doctor Karajagi PHC, who removed the cloth and helped save Bhagyashree from a life-threatening situation was reportedly transferred suddenly. The family alleged that the authorities were reluctant to take action against the GIMS doctors, and were instead targeting the whistleblower. The family also filed a complaint, demanding action against those responsible for negligence. GIMS officials denied any wrongdoing. Kalaburagi (GIMS) District surgeon Dr Asna(Rukhia) Baig, told **Salar News** that, there was no negligence involved in the case and that the issue arose due to a communication gap between the doctors and the patient's family. They claimed gauze was used to control bleeding and that the family failed to return for its scheduled removal, leading to complications.

GIMS DHO Dr Sharanabasappa Katanal and officials did not respond to the queries. *—Salar News*

Driverless train for Yellow Line inspected

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

The Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (Southern Circle) AM Choudhary and his team conducted a statutory inspection on Monday of the driverless trains received from China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation on the Bengaluru Metro's Yellow Line between RV Road and Bommasandra, officials said.

This inspection is a mandatory requirement before seeking approval from the Railway Ministry for new rolling stock/trains, they added.

"Once the rolling stock/train approval is received from the Railway Board and the signalling tests on this line are completed, the Commissioner of Metro Rail Safety (CMRS) will be called again for a final inspection of the entire Yellow Line R-5 Section," a Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) official said.

PHOTO: BMRCL

After obtaining the necessary sanction, this line can be opened for operation, it added.

The first driverless metro train consisting six coaches arrived in Bengaluru from China on February 14, 2024.

These coaches were delivered to the Hebbagodi depot in Electronic City, the city's IT hub. *—PTI*

After poll loss, desertions rock Sena (UBT)

Shinde urged his party leaders to give another shock to Thackeray's party in civic elections

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Barely three months after the Maharashtra assembly polls, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) has been jolted by a series of desertions, with several party functionaries and even former MLAs abandoning the party.

The latest big name to quit the party was Rajan Salvi, a three-time MLA from the Rajapur assembly seat in Ratnagiri district in the coastal Konkan region.

A staunch supporter of the Thackerays, Salvi joined the Shiv Sena, led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, with his supporters earlier this month. Days later, another former MLA from Konkan joined Shinde's party along with many Sena (UBT) office-bearers.

For the Thackerays, the loss of leaders like Patel and Salvi is beyond an organisational setback as they enjoyed a degree of confidence in the first family, according to political analysts.

In 2022, Thackeray, then the head of the Bal Thackeray-founded Shiv Sena, suffered the biggest blow of his political career when Shinde rebelled against him, and 39 MLAs and 13 MPs joined the revolt.

Shinde, who aligned with the BJP to become the chief minister, subsequently got the party's name and its 'bow and arrow' symbol. The faction headed by Thackeray became Shiv Sena (UBT), a partner in the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

However, since his party's defeat in the 2024 assembly polls, the cadre is now migrating to the Shinde-led Sena. Of the 288 assembly seats in the state, the Sena (UBT) contested 97 but won only 20. By contrast, Shinde's party, a constituent of the BJP-led Mahayuti, grabbed 57 of the 87 seats it contested.

Amid desertions from the Sena (UBT), an upbeat Shinde recently urged his party leaders to "give another shock (to Thackeray's party) in the civic elections".

—*PTI*

Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray with leader Sanjay Raut **PHOTO: PTI**

Gujarat to host AICC session after 64 years

AHMEDABAD, 24 FEB

When the Congress holds its AICC session in Ahmedabad in April, it will only be the third time in the party's 139-year-old history that Gujarat will host this mega conclave with the last one held 64 years ago in 1961 in Bhavnagar. All India Congress Committee (AICC) session on 8 and 9 April will deliberate on the challenges posed by the BJP's "anti-people" policies and its alleged attack on the Constitution, as well as on charting the outfit's future road map, the opposition party said in New Delhi on Sunday. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge will preside over both the meetings, which will be attended by Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, all chief ministers of Congress-ruled states and other AICC delegates. —*PTI*

BJP's PC George in jail in hate speech case

KOTTAYAM, 24 FEB

A court in this district remanded BJP leader PC George to judicial custody on Monday in a hate speech case after sending him to police custody until 6 pm the same day. The Erattupetta Munsif Magistrate Court rejected George's bail application earlier in the day. Senior police officials questioned George before he was sent to jail, police sources said. The case was taken up for consideration at 12.30pm, followed by arguments from both sides. George's lawyer argued that he did not "incite religious hatred or hurt religious sentiments". George was accused of delivering a hate speech against a minority community during a TV channel discussion. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Jaishankar, 61 heads of missions visit Kaziranga

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

External Affairs minister S Jaishankar and heads of missions of 61 countries took elephant and jeep safari rides in the Kaziranga National Park (KNP) on Monday morning, officials said. The envoys arrived in Jorhat along with the minister on Sunday night and reached KNP, famed for its one-horned rhinoceros, early this morning. The ambassadors first took the elephant safari inside the park's central range at Kohora with Jaishankar riding the famed elephant, Pradyumna. After the elephant safari, they enjoyed the jeep safari inside the park, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Jaishankar and some of the envoys were seen feeding the elephants after the safari. —*PTI*

Mamata hikes government doctors' salary

KOLKATA, 24 FEB

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced a salary hike for government doctors. She announced a salary hike of Rs 15,000 for senior doctors, and Rs 10,000 for junior doctors including interns, house staff and post-graduate trainees. Banerjee, also the Health Minister, further announced a fund of Rs 2 crore for medical college for cultural and sporting activities. The CM also demanded strict punishment RG Kar convict and highlighted importance of the Aparajita Bill, which seeks capital punishment for rape convicts. Simultaneously, Banerjee revoked the suspension of 12 doctors of in connection with the death of the woman during childbirth due to the admission of expired intravenous fluid. "There was definitely medical negligence."—*PTI*

BJP'S NAIK HOLDS 'JANATA DARBAR' IN SHINDE'S THANE

THANE, 24 FEB

BJP leader and Forest Minister Ganesh Naik on Monday held a janta darbar in Thane, the home turf of Deputy CM Eknath Shinde, rejecting speculation of one-upmanship in the Mahayuti alliance. Naik, however, added that no one holds permanent dominance in politics and leadership changes over time, based on public acceptance.

He said the next public hearing would be held in Thane next month.

Thane BJP leader Sanjay Waghule told reporters that more than 400 tokens were distributed to citizens at the janta darbar (public hearing) venue at 8 am. Speaking to reporters, Naik, an MLA from neighbouring Navi Mumbai, dismissed speculation about political rivalries. —*PTI*

SPECULATION OF RAPPROCHEMENT

MNS chief Raj Thackeray met his cousin and Shiv Sena (UBT) head Uddhav Thackeray at a wedding function in Mumbai, raising speculation that they might be keen on resolving their political differences ahead of civic polls in Maharashtra **PHOTO: PTI**

Atishi claims Rekha removed Ambedkar pic, BJP refutes

BJP leader Amit Malviya shared a photograph of CM Rekha Gupta's office on his X account showing the pictures still on the wall **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Delhi Assembly witnessed high drama on Monday as Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs staged a protest inside the House. Leader of Opposition Atishi alleged that the portraits of Dr BR Ambedkar and Shaheed Bhagat Singh had been removed from the Chief Minister's office which sparked a heated confrontation between the ruling and Opposition members.

BJP leader Amit Malviya wrote on X that the photos of Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh were still hanging in Rekha Gupta's office.

"This is the room of the chief minister of Delhi, where the pictures of all the great men are still hanging. Liquor scam accused Arvind Kejriwal cannot go to the chief minister's office, so he is resorting to cheap politics to spread confusion. The public humiliated him so much that he was not even able to show his face after the defeat, but still, he is not desisting from his cheap actions," he wrote on X in Hindi. —*PTI*

AAP MLAs protest over BJP's Rs 2,500 to women promise

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

AAP MLAs led by Leader of Opposition (LoP) Atishi staged a protest outside the office of Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in the assembly on Monday, demanding the fulfilment of the BJP's promise to provide Rs 2,500 to women in the city after the first Cabinet meeting.

"We asked for time from the Delhi CM two days ago. But we were not given time, so we are here outside her office in the assembly. We want to meet her regarding the promise of PM Modi to provide Rs 2,500 to women after the first Cabinet. Modi's guarantee is proving wrong," Atishi told PTI Videos after meeting CM Rekha Gupta.

The protest took place as the first session of the newly constituted Delhi Assembly commenced on Monday, marking the BJP's return to power after 26 years. —*PTI*

BJP DEFENDS

Govt's 'lies' exposed, says Cong in USAID row

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Congress on Monday cited a Union Finance Ministry report on the USAID-funded projects in India to claim that it has thoroughly exposed the government's "lies", prompting the BJP to accuse the opposition party of defending "covert interference" by foreign donors seeking to destabilise India's democracy.

Siezing on the information, Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said on X, As stated in the finance ministry's annual report for 2023-24, USAID is currently implementing seven projects in collaboration with the government of India, with a combined budget of approximately USD 750 million, he said.

"Not a single of these projects has to do with voter turnout. All of them are with and through the Union government," Ramesh said.

BJP IT department head Amit Malviya hit back, claiming that the desperation of the Congress and its ecosystem to deflect from the controversial USAID funding routed through various

PHOTO: PTI

- BJP IT department head Amit Malviya hit back, claiming that the desperation of the Congress and its ecosystem to deflect from the controversial USAID funding

"George Soros-linked fronts and a labyrinth of NGO structures to meddle with India's electoral process is a dead giveaway".

A political controversy erupted in the country earlier this month after the Elon Musk-led DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) said that it had cancelled a USD 21 million grant to India to boost 'voter turnout'. —*PTI*

'NITISH TO DECIDE ON SON'S ENTRY INTO POLITICS'

BALLIA, 24 FEB

The decision on **Nishant Kumar's** entry into politics rests solely with his father, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the state's Rural Development Minister Shravan Kumar said on Monday.

He also clarified that Nitish Kumar was absent from Rekha Gupta's swearing-in as Delhi chief minister as he had a pre-scheduled programme in Nalanda. The JD(U) was represented by working president Sanjay Jha and Union minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh.

"Whether Nishant ji joins politics or not depends on Nitish Kumar. This decision is not possible without his approval. However, there is no doubt that Nishant Kumar has the knowledge and the grasp of Bihar's political landscape," he told reporters in Ballia, where he was attending a private function. —*PTI*

BREAKING RECORDS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday witnessed 'Jhumoir Binanandini', a dance performance around 8,000 artistes of the tea tribe community attempting to set a world record at the Sarusajai Sports Complex, in Assam. He also held a roadshow in Guwahati **PHOTO: ANI**

Remark against Indira Gandhi stalls Rajasthan assembly

JAIPUR, 24 FEB

The deadlock in the Rajasthan assembly over state minister Avinash Gehlot's remark against former prime minister Indira Gandhi and suspension of six Congress MLAs persisted on Monday, with the House witnessing repeated adjournments.

After three adjournments, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel and others held a meeting with the Congress MLAs to resolve the issue and reached a consensus to end the deadlock.

However when the House met again, the stalemate continued as Speaker Vasudev Devnani and Patel were not satisfied with the response of Congress legislator and PCC chief Govind Singh Dotasra.

Prior to this, when the House reassembled after the third adjournment, the Congress MLAs, except six suspended legislators, returned to their seats.

Congress MLAs have been holding a sit-in in the House since Friday evening over Gehlot's remark against Indira Gandhi. —*PTI*

Congress workers protest over Rajasthan Minister Avinash Gehlot's remark against former prime minister Indira Gandhi, outside the state Assembly in Jaipur, on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

Priyanka writes to PM over Wayanad relief delay

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, about the hardships by the people of Wayanad while trying to rebuild their lives after the devastating landslides last year. She urged him to convert the government's relief package into a grant.

Noting that a devastating landslide took place on 30 July, 2024, in and around these two habitations of Wayanad district, she said in the aftermath of this disaster, 298 people were found dead, 231 bodies were recovered along with 223 body parts and 32 persons were reported missing and declared dead. She said 17 families were completely wiped out and 1,685 buildings damaged.

"It is heartbreaking that even six months after a horrific tragedy destroyed their lives and livelihoods, they are facing unimaginable hardships," Priyanka Gandhi said.

The central government recently announced a relief package of 529.50 crore for the victims of the devastation. However, the announcement of was inadequate and a conditional relief package is extremely disappointing, Priyanka Gandhi said.

"Apart from its inadequacy, it is unprecedented that the package comes with two conditions: first that the funds shall be disbursed, not as a grant as is the norm, but as a loan, second, that they should be spent in their entirety by the 31st of March 2025. These conditions display a shocking lack of sensitivity towards the people" —*PTI*

TO CURB HEALTH MENACE

PM nominates Omar, Mahindra, Mohanlal for obesity drive

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday nominated 10 persons from different walks of life, including Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, businessman Anand Mahindra and actor Mohanlal, to help fight obesity, a day after he exhorted people to take measures to curb the health menace.

Bhojpuri singer-actor Nirahua, shooting champion Manu Bhaker, weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani, actor R Madhavan, singer Shreya Ghoshal and philanthropist and MP Sudha Murty are the other personalities nominated by him.

Omar Abdullah said he was happy to join the campaign against obesity launched by Prime Minister Modi.

Among those nominated by Abdullah were Biocon Managing Director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, businessman Sajjan Jindal, actor Deepika Padukone, former tennis player Sania Mirza, former cricketer Irfan Pathan, MP Supriya Sule and Wushu player Kuldeep Handoo.

Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra said in order to achieve the mission of a Viksit Bharat by 2047, we not only need a strong economy but a healthy population.

Mahindra nominated Bollywood actor Anil Kapoor, actor Gul panag, Zerodha Co-founder Nikhil Kamath, chess champion Vishwanathan Anand and badminton champion PV Sindhu. —*PTI*

J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, businessman Anand Mahindra and actor Mohanlal **PHOTO: FB**

YSRCP WON'T GET OPPN STATUS, SAYS DyCM PAWAN

AMARAVATI, 24 FEB

Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan said that the YSRCP led by YS Jagan Mohan Reddy will not be accorded the status of opposition for five years.

Addressing a press conference at the media point in the Assembly, the Janasena founder said, "Be prepared. With 11 seats, you will not be given the status of opposition."

According to the actor-politician, the status of opposition is not decided by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu or Janasena, but by rules, regulations and norms.

Kalyan criticised YSRCP leaders for their behaviour during Governor S Abdul Nazeer's address, where they allegedly tore his speech copies. He condemned the act as "inappropriate" and urged them to maintain decorum.

He said the party with the highest majority will form the government. —*PTI*

7 killed in Bihar tempo-truck collision

PATNA, 24 FEB

At least seven people were killed when a tempo in which they were travelling collided head-on with a truck in Bihar's Patna district, police said on Monday.

The accident occurred near Noora bridge in the Masaurhi area on Sunday night, they said. Station House Officer (SHO) of Masaurhi police station, Vijay Kumar told PTI that "Police reached the spot after receiving the information of the collision between a tempo and a truck near Noora bridge. The collision took place at around 9.30 pm on Sunday. Seven people died on the spot."

The identity of the victims are being ascertained, said the SHO. "No arrests have been made so far. Further investigation is on", he said. *—PTI*

No VIP darshan at Kashi Vishwanath amid Mahashivratri

VARANASI, 24 FEB

Anticipating a heavy rush of devotees during Mahashivratri, authorities have decided to suspend the VIP 'darshan' facility at the Kashi Vishwanath temple here from 25 to 27 February. Kashi Vishwanath Temple's Chief Executive Officer, Vishw Bhushan Mishra said on Monday that the number of visitors to the temple has increased due to the return flow of devotees from the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. With Mahashivratri falling on 26 February this year alongside the Kumbh Mela, pilgrims from across the country, along with saints from various akharas, including Naga sadhus, are expected to arrive in large numbers to offer prayers, he noted. Given the hot and humid weather conditions, prolonged waiting could pose health risks, especially for children, women, and elderly visitors. *—PTI*

Chennai teacher hits child for not reciting Hindi poem

CHENNAI, 24 FEB

A teacher of a popular school here was suspended allegedly for hitting a class three student for failing to recite a poem in Hindi. The management on Monday said the teacher has been suspended following an enquiry on 21 February. An official maintained that this incident was only between the parents of the affected student and the teacher. Following the incident last week, the parents of the student studying in Bhavan's Rajaji Vidyashram School here took up the issue with the management of the CBSE school that maintained a 'zero tolerance' policy' to violence. The disciplinary action was taken as the school guidelines prohibited corporal punishment, physical, verbal or emotional abuse. *—PTI*

Pulsar Suni detained for ruckus at hotel in Kerala

KOCHI, 24 FEB

Sunil NS alias 'Pulsar' Suni, the primary accused in 2017 actress assault case in Kerala, was taken into police custody for allegedly causing a ruckus at a hotel in Rayamangalam, Ernakulam. According to police, Suni became agitated over a delay in food service on Sunday night. He allegedly verbally abused the hotel staff, issued death threats, and smashed a glass by throwing it onto the floor. It was on 17 September, 2024, Suni was granted bail by the Supreme Court in the actress assault case in which actor Dileep is also an accused. He was released on bail after spending seven and a half years in prison. *—PTI*

In its letter, management committee emphasised that the mosque had undergone cleaning and decoration ahead of Ramadan for centuries without any objections from the ASI **PHOTO: X**

Sambhal admin: No mosque renovation without ASI nod

In SC, UP claims mosque is built on public land

SAMBHAL, 24 FEB

A day after the Shahi Jama Masjid management sought the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)'s permission to redecorate the mosque ahead of Ramadan, the Sambhal administration on Monday said no work should be done without the agency's approval.

Shahi Jama Masjid management committee President Zafar Ali told reporters on Sunday that it had written to ASI, seeking permission to clean, paint and decorate the mosque.

Asked about the management committee's letter to the ASI, Sambhal District Magistrate Rajender Pensiya told reporters that the matter was pending in court and the property belonged to the ASI.

"No one has the right to tamper with it (mosque) in any way," he said.

"I don't think there is any need for painting this type of a disputed structure," he added.

In its letter, management committee emphasised that the mosque had undergone cleaning and decoration ahead of Ramadan for centuries without any objections from the ASI.

However, as a precautionary measure to maintain peace and harmony, the committee decided to seek permission this time.

The Mughal-era mosque burst into the limelight after violence erupted during a survey as protesters clashed with security personnel, leading to multiple casualties.

The survey of the mosque was ordered by a local court after a petition was filed that claimed a Harihar temple had stood at the site.

Ahead of Mahashivratri, security has been stepped up at the Shri Kartik Mahadev temple in Khaggu Sarai, which reopened after 46 years.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh government on Monday told Supreme Court the Sambhal mosque authorities are trying to encroach upon public land. In a status report filed in the court today, it has also claimed that the mosque authorities had submitted misleading pictures in the court. The mosque as well as the well that has been central to the issue are located on public land, and the mosque authorities are trying to claim private rights over it, asserted the government in its report.

The mosque committee had last month cited a Google Maps image to claim that the well was within the mosque complex.

However, the government said the petitioner has annexed misleading photographs and called their application "misconceived". *—PTI*

Maharashtra Cyber Cell is probing an obscenity case registered against Allahbadia over obscene remarks during the show **PHOTO: PTI**

Ranveer, Chanchalani appear before cops

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

YouTubers Ranveer Allahbadia and Ashish Chanchlani on Monday appeared before the Maharashtra Cyber to record their statements in India's Got Latent case, officials said.

On 17 February, the Cyber Cell issued summons to Allahbadia on 24 February for questioning in connection with his "watch your parents have sex" remark on Samay Raina's show. The remarks had drawn severe backlash on social media and across the country. The remarks were also slammed by the Supreme Court.

Responding to summons issued by Maharashtra Cyber, Allahbadia and Chanchlani reached its headquarters at Mahape in Navi Mumbai in the afternoon, an official said.

Maharashtra Cyber is probing an obscenity case registered against Allahbadia and others over alleged obscene remarks during the show on YouTube. The National Commission for Women has also issued summons to Allahbadia, Sharan Raina, and Apoorva Mukhija over their derogatory remarks in a now-deleted video.

Chanchlani had approached the Supreme Court, seeking the transfer of his FIR to Mumbai after a case was registered against him in Assam's Guwahati. On Friday, the Supreme Court clubbed Chanchlani's plea with Allahbadia and sent notice to both Maharashtra and Assam. *—PTI*

Silkyara rat miners join rescue ops in T'gana tunnel

HYDERABAD, 24 FEB

The survival chances of the eight people who remain trapped in the Srisailam Left Bank Canal tunnel after a partial collapse two days ago are "very remote,", Telangana Minister Jupally Krishna Rao said on Monday.

He also mentioned that a team of rat miners, who had rescued the construction workers trapped in the Silkyara Bend-Barkot tunnel in Uttarakhand in 2023, have joined the rescue.

He said rescuing the trapped individuals would take at least three to four days, as the site is filled with muck and debris, making it a daunting task for the rescuers.

Those trapped are: Manoj Kumar and Sri Niwas from Uttar Pradesh, Sunny Singh (Jammu and Kashmir), Gurpreet Singh (Punjab) and Sandeep Sahu, Jegta Xess, Santosh Sahu and Anuj Sahu, all from Jharkhand. Two are engineers, two operators and four labourers.

According to him, the Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) which weighs a few hundred tons, got almost flushed away by about 200m after the collapse and due to the gushing water.

The water entering the tunnel has become an impediment to the rescue.

Meanwhile, the workers who survived the mishap hoped for the safe return of their colleagues.

Nirmal Sahu, one of the workers, said when they went inside the tunnel on 22 February, the gush of water increased and loose soil also started falling off. *—PTI*

Rescue underway to extricate eight people who have remained trapped in the SLBC tunnel **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

SC bins plea to regulate internet prices

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea seeking regulation of Internet prices in the country.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar dismissed the plea filed by one Rajat, saying consumers had multiple options for availing of Internet services.

"It's a free market. There are several options. BSNL and MTNL are also giving you Internet," the bench observed.

The petitioner alleged that the majority of the market share was controlled by Jio and Reliance.

The bench then said, "If you are alleging cartelisation, then go to the Competition Commission of India."

Cartelisation is when a group of competitors agree to limit competition, which can lead to higher prices and lower quality goods and services. It's an illegal anti-competitive practice. *—PTI*

UP student raped on way back home

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 24 FEB

A 17-year-old B Tech student was allegedly raped by a man who gave her a lift on his motorcycle when she was returning home from college in the Muzaffarnagar district of Uttar Pradesh, police said on Monday.

Police said an FIR has been lodged against the accused and three of his friends, who aided him in the act.

Charthawal police station in-charge Rajesh Dhanvat said the incident took place in the evening of February 21 when the student was returning home from college and the accused, Himanshu, gave her a lift on his motorcycle.

"However, the accused then took her to a field, where he raped her. His three friends helped him in the act," the police official said.

The girl later narrated her ordeal to her parents, who lodged a complaint leading to an FIR against Himanshu and his friends Sagir, Siddharth and Adesh under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and POCSO Act, Dhanvat said. *—PTI*

Nepal urges India for justice over KIIT row

BHUBANESWAR, 24 FEB

The National Human Rights Commission of Nepal has urged its Indian counterpart to investigate the unnatural death of a 20-year-old student at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) here and ensure justice for her.

The alleged death by suicide of BTech student Prakriti Lamsal and the subsequent attack on protesting Nepalese pupils at KIIT and their eviction from the campus created a furore, prompting the Nepal government to intervene in the matter.

It urged India's NHRC to ensure security for the Nepalese students and ensure that they can study in a fear-free environment, besides bringing the university officials and individuals involved in the incident to book.

Based on the complaints received, the commission also sought information from the Nepal Embassy in India about the incident and the condition of the students, the release said.

Meanwhile, the Odisha government has asked KIIT authorities to initiate action against the employees involved in the mistreatment of students. The government's directive came a day after Nepal Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba spoke to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi over the phone. *—PTI*

The alleged suicide of BTech student and the attack on protesting Nepalese pupils at KIIT created a furore **PHOTO: PTI**

HC dissatisfied with Volkswagen's argument

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Bombay High Court on Monday expressed "prime facie" dissatisfaction with Skoda Auto Volkswagen India's arguments against a USD 1.4 billion notice from the Customs department.

It also commended a department officer for his dedicated efforts and thorough research prior to issuing the notice.

"To entertain such a plea at the stage of show cause notice is something you have to convince us. This is troubling us whether we should entertain the plea at the stage of show cause notice," it added.

The notice claimed the German group, led in the country by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, allegedly provided misleading information to the department by misclassifying its imports of Audi, Skoda and Volkswagen cars as "individual parts" instead of "Completely Knocked Down" (CKD) units, thereby paying significantly lower Customs duties.

The CKD units attract a 30-35 per cent duty, but Volkswagen declared its imports as separate components in different shipments and paid only 5-15 per cent in duties. The department said import of various unassembled parts of cars should have been declared as CKD units. If almost all the parts barring one or two are imported as individual components and then assembled here at the company's Aurangabad unit then why should it not be held under the CKD category, the HC noted on Monday. *—PTI*

TO BEAT STRESS

Displaced people in Manipur take to vegetable cultivation

IMPHAL, 24 FEB

Many people displaced by ethnic conflict in Manipur have taken to vegetable cultivation as stress-buster amid hardships endured due to the strife and life away from their homes.

At Sajiwa in Imphal East, which has one of the largest pre-fabricated housing complexes for internally displaced people (IDP), the inmates are cultivating seasonal vegetables on arable land adjacent to the facility.

"Almost all of us were farmers engaged in rice and vegetable cultivation in our native villages before violence broke out. Now, we are trying to survive by taking up any available jobs. But many of us don't even get that.

"As sitting idle is out of option, we approached the authorities and requested them to allow us to cultivate," L Deva, who was a resident of Sadu Yengkhuman village in Imphal East, told PTI.

Deva is now joyous as the tomatoes he had grown are ripening.

"We started cultivation just three-four months back," he said.

Around 150 inmates are growing tomatoes, cabbage and potatoes.

Another Internally displaced person, K Kumar, said life is tough as he has to live in congested conditions at the prefabricated house he has been allotted but at least, he gets to live with his family.

Reflecting on his family's life at relief camps before being allotted the prefabricated house at Sajiwa, he said, "The room where we live in now is very small but we have a kitchen for ourselves. At least we are in better condition than when we were staying in relief camps."

"At present, we are not being allowed to return to our native village. When we tried going, security there did not allow us, saying the area is still a 'red zone'," he said.

Nearly 700 people are staying at around 200 prefabricated houses at Sajiwa.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic conflict between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis in Manipur since 3 May, 2023. *—PTI*

150 inmates are growing vegetables **PHOTO: PTI**

- Another Internally displaced person, K Kumar, said life is tough as he has to live in congested conditions at the prefabricated house he has been allotted but at least, he gets to live with his family.

Woman smuggles drugs worth ₹11 cr at IGI airport

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

A 20-year-old woman was arrested for smuggling into the country narcotics worth over Rs 11 crore, concealed inside packets of cookies and rice, at Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, the Customs department said on Monday.

The accused was intercepted upon her arrival from Bangkok on 21 February, it said.

"During examination of the black trolley bag, eight cookies and rice packets containing a green-coloured narcotic substance, suspected to be ganja or marijuana, with a total net weight of 11,284g,

were recovered," the Customs department said in a statement.

The woman passenger hailed from Noida in Uttar Pradesh. *—PTI*

AWE-STRUCK

A child during the Grapes and Watermelon mela by HOPCOMs at Lalbagh Road, Bengaluru on Monday
PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Right parties set record highs in German elections

Germany's conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz won in the national election Sunday, while Alternative for Germany doubled its support in the strongest showing for a Far-Right party since World War II.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz conceded defeat for his centre-left Social Democrats after what he called "a bitter election result". Projections for ARD and ZDF public television showed his party finishing in third place with its worst post-war result in a national parliamentary election.

Merz said he hopes to put a coalition government together by Easter, but that's likely to be challenging.

The election took place seven months earlier than originally planned after Scholz's unpopular coalition collapsed in November, three years into a term that was increasingly marred by infighting. There was widespread discontent and not much enthusiasm for any of the candidates.

The campaign was dominated by worries about the years-long stagnation of Europe's biggest economy and pressure to curb migration — something that caused friction after Merz pushed hard in recent weeks for a tougher approach. It took place against a background of growing uncertainty over the future of Ukraine and Europe's alliance with the United States.

Germany is the most populous country of the 27-nation European Union and a leading member of NATO. It has been Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier, after the US. It will be central to shaping the continent's response to the challenges of the coming years, including the Trump administration's confrontational foreign and trade policy.

The projections, based on exit polls and partial counting, put support for Merz's Union bloc around 28.5 per cent and the anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD), about 20.5 per cent — roughly double its result from 2021.

Conservative leader Friedrich Merz won the German elections, but said that he is unlikely to form a coalition government with the Far-Right AfD, who came in second
PHOTO: X

They put support for Scholz's Social Democrats at just over 16 per cent, far lower than in the last election and below their previous post-war low of 20.5 per cent from 2017. The environmentalist Greens, their remaining partners in the outgoing government, were on about 12 per cent.

"I am aware of the responsibility," Merz said. "I am also aware of the scale of the task that now lies ahead of us. I approach it with the utmost respect, and I know that it will not be easy."

"The world out there isn't waiting for us, and it isn't waiting for long-drawn-out coalition talks and negotiations," he told cheering supporters.

The Greens' candidate for chancellor and current Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck, said that Merz would do well to moderate his tone after a hard-fought campaign.

"Now he must see that he acts like a chancellor,"said Habeck.

The Greens suffered the least from participating in Scholz's unpopular government. The Social Democrats' general secretary, Matthias Miersch, suggested that their defeat was no surprise — "this election wasn't lost in the last eight weeks".

AfD co-leader Tino Chrupalla told cheering supporters that "we have achieved something historic today".

"We are now the political centre and we have left the fringes behind us," he said. The party's strongest previous showing was 12.6 per cent in 2017, when it first entered the national parliament.

The party's candidate for chancellor, Alice Weidel, said it is "open for coalition negotiations" with Merz's party, and that "otherwise, no change of policy is possible in Germany". Merz has repeatedly ruled out working with AfD, as have other mainstream parties — and did so again in a televised post-election exchange with Weidel and other leaders.

"It won't be able to implement it with left-wing parties," Weidel said. If Merz ends up forming an alliance with the Social Democrats and Greens, "it will be an unstable government that doesn't last four years. There will be an interim Chancellor Friedrich Merz and in the coming years we will overtake the Union"

Merz dismissed the idea that voters wanted a coalition with AfD.

"We have fundamentally different views. They want the opposite of what we want, so there will be no cooperation," Merz added. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

What happens when the Pope is incapacitated?

While the Vatican has detailed laws and rituals to ensure the transfer of power when a pope dies or resigns, they do not apply if he is sick or even unconscious. And there are no specific norms outlining what happens to the leadership of the Catholic Church if a pope becomes totally incapacitated.

As a result, even though Pope Francis remains hospitalised in critical condition with a complex lung infection, he is still pope and very much in charge.

Still, Francis' hospital stay is raising obvious questions about what happens if he loses consciousness for a prolonged period, or whether he might follow in Pope Benedict XVI's footsteps and resign if he becomes unable to lead. On Monday, Francis' hospital stay will hit the 10-day mark, equalling the length of his 2021 hospital stay for surgery to remove 33 centimeters (13 inches) of his colon.

His prolonged illness and age - 88 - have revived interest about how papal power is exercised in the Holy See, how it is transferred and under what circumstances. And it points to the legislative loophole that currently exists in what to do if a pope gets so sick that he can't govern.

Canon law does have provisions for when a bishop gets sick and can't run his diocese, but none for a pope. Canon 412 says a diocese can be declared "impeded" if its bishop - due to "captivity, banishment, exile, or incapacity" - cannot fulfil his pastoral functions. In such cases, the day-to-day running of the diocese shifts to an auxiliary bishop, a vicar general or someone else.

Even though Francis is the bishop of Rome, no explicit provision exists for the pope if he similarly becomes "impeded." Canon 335 declares simply that when the Holy See is "vacant or entirely impeded," nothing can be altered in the governance of the church. But it doesn't say what it means for the Holy See to be "entirely impeded" or what provisions might come into play if it ever were.

In 2021, a team of canon lawyers set out to propose norms to fill that legislative gap. They created a canonical crowdsourcing initiative to craft a new church law regulating the office of a retired pope as well as norms to apply when a pope is unable to govern, either temporarily or permanently.

The proposed norms explain that, with medical advancements, it's entirely likely that at some point a pope will be alive but unable to govern. It argues that the church must provide for the declaration of a "totally impeded see" and the transfer of power for the sake of its own unity."At first, the promoting group was accused of imprudently choosing topics that were too sensitive and controversial," said one of the coordinators, canon lawyer Geraldina Boni.

But then, "a widespread consensus formed," she told The Associated Press. Even Francis' own canon lawyer, Cardinal Gianfranco Ghirlanda, acknowledged some sort of norms were necessary if the pope "lost consciousness or the ability to perform human acts."

"The problem is, who declares that the pope is in a situation where he cannot govern?" he told Italian daily Il Giornale in 2022.

Ghirlanda largely backed the crowdsourcing initiative's idea, proposing a committee of medical experts to determine if the pope's condition is irreversible. If they confirm it is, the Rome-based cardinals would be summoned to declare the pope cannot govern, triggering a conclave.

Francis confirmed in 2022 that shortly after he was elected pope he wrote a letter of resignation, to be invoked if he became medically incapacitated. He said he gave it to the then-secretary of state, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and said he assumed Bertone had delivered it to secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin's office when he retired.

The text is not public, and the conditions Francis contemplated for a resignation are unknown. It is also not known if such a letter would be canonically valid. Canon law requires a papal resignation to be "freely and properly manifested" - as was the case when Benedict announced his resignation in 2013.

The only time papal power changes hands is when a pope dies or resigns. At that time, a whole series of rites and rituals comes into play governing the "interregnum" - the period between the end of one pontificate and the election of a new pope.

During that period, known as the "sede vacante," or "empty See," the camerlengo, or chamberlain, runs the administration and finances of the Holy See. *—PTI*

Pope Francis remains hospitalised in critical condition with a complex lung infection
PHOTO: ANI

3 years of war: Winners & losers of the end game in Ukraine

The 90-minute phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on 6 February, 2025, was the official initiation of return to diplomacy ending the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Trump had made ending the Ukraine war a campaign issue, dubbing it as former President Joe Biden's war.

The reality on the ground is that Ukraine is losing and Russia is gaining more ground every passing day. And that despite Trump's narrative, it has been a proxy war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine.

The Joe Biden and Neocon's strategy to weaken Russia, effect regime change, destroy its economy, and isolate it from the Global South has clearly failed.

Now Trump is left to 'manage' this Western defeat, and he would like to make it look like his personal victory.

No wonder then that Zelensky was 'informed' about the phone call afterwards, while Europe was not mentioned in this phone call, making the Europeans sore.

The European leaders were stunned and pleaded that they and Ukraine be included in the peace talks.

It was left to Trump's defence secretary Pete Hegseth to explain to NATO's Ukraine Defense Contact Group on February 12 what to expect in the peace negotiations that will follow soon.

Hegseth said, "The war must end; it was unrealistic to expect any return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders. Nato membership for Ukraine is not a realistic goal."

Trump's plan was furthered by US Vice President J.D. Vance during the Munich Security Conference on 15 February, where he emphasised that Europe must both pay and play a bigger role in European security.

Vance said that America now "focuses on areas of the world that are in great danger," meaning that Europe can look after Ukraine and their own security, while the US will concentrate on the Asia Pacific, and the Arctic region.

Vance also chastised the Europeans for being too 'woke', not holding on to their values by clamping down on free speech, and taking delight in the cancellation of the elections in Romania where an anti-Ukraine war pro-Russian party had won.

Interestingly, Indian external affairs minister S. Jaishankar similarly rebuked the Europeans for critiquing Indian democracy.

Meanwhile, Trump has already announced his negotiation team which will consist of Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Director of CIA John Ratcliff, National Security Advisor Michael Waltz and special envoy Steve Witkoff.

The return to diplomatic relations between the US and Russia has troubled European leaders and Ukraine, who fear being left behind in their own future. India however, stands at a critical juncture
PHOTO: PTI

Trump has dropped General (Retd) Keith Kellogg, US Special Envoy for Ukraine and Russia, who is known to be a Moscow hawk. Trump said that he wants to "work together, very closely" with Putin to end the war in Ukraine and he would love to have Russia back in G7.

The US has also asked that gas prices be lowered so that Russia comes to the negotiating table.

Much of this is music to Putin's ears, but he can nonetheless be expected to drive a hard bargain during negotiations.

At the same time, Moscow is not taking either peace or any welcome back to the Western world for granted. The Russians know that they have been repeatedly betrayed by the West on NATO expansion, starting with a warning from US Ambassador William Burns who informed his government back in 2008 that the Russians had warned against Ukraine's entry into NATO.

Moreover, the US and the European dream of weakening Russia after Ukraine's pro-Kremlin President Viktor Yanukovich fled the country following massive street protests has made the Russians wary.

The Biden administration had a role in repeatedly rejecting peace agreements from Putin. This forced the Russians to change their supply lines to the East while the US isolated them, froze their strategic reserves of USD 300 billion, and placed their country under maximum sanctions as it tried to bring Russia to its knees.

Therefore, Putin will have his own red line. He has always said a neutral Ukraine is essential for peace. There will be hard bargaining for how much territory he will return, which is likely to be minimal.

Some things important for Moscow have not been mentioned by the Trump team. For example, removing sanctions, allowing Russia back into the SWIFT inter-bank messaging system, unfreezing their strategic reserves and re-constructing some kind of long-term European security architecture so that there is no return to war.

It is clear that if peace does come about, then the US will concentrate on the re-colonisation of new regions around the Arctic, focus on building deterrence against China, re-organise the US military-industrial complex as an even bigger arms seller, and corner new oil and gas deals.

Russia will assert its position as a military superpower but continue to strengthen the partnerships with allies that have shown loyalty in the last few difficult years, such as China, India and the Global South.

It is here that India which has already gained from cheap Russian oil over the last three years can reap major new benefits.

Russia has repeatedly stated that India has been a consistent friend and this relationship can only get stronger. However, India too will have to play it right, take advantage of a favourable geo-strategic situation, and hope that some years of peace between these great powers remains a possibility. *—PTI*

Germany's Merz promises 'independence' from US

New Chancellor says his priority is to strengthen Europe

BERLIN, 24 FEB

Germany's Friedrich Merz has pledged to achieve "independence" from the United States after his Centre-Right alliance won parliamentary elections held amid doubts about US President Donald Trump's commitment to Europe's security.

Merz, who faces complex negotiations with his party's traditional centre-left rival to form a coalition government after ruling out the second-placed hard-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), said that it would be his "absolute priority" to strengthen Europe so it does not have to rely on Washington for its defence.

> **After Donald Trump's latest comments in the last week, it is clear that the Americans, or at least this portion of the Americans, this government, care very little about the fate of Europe**
> —Friedrich Merz

Merz said he was not sure that NATO would exist in its "current form" by the time of the next meeting of the transatlantic military alliance in June, "or whether we will have to establish an independent European defence capability much more quickly".

He also took aim at tech billionaire Elon Musk, Trump's cost-cutting tsar and close ally, for intervening in the election campaign to support the AfD, which secured its best-ever result in a national poll.

Merz's Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) alliance won 208 seats with 28.6 percent of the vote in Sunday's election, preliminary results showed, followed by the AfD with 152 seats and 20.8 percent of the vote, doubling what it polled in the last election.

Outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz's centre-left Social Democratic Party (SDP), which had governed in a widely unpopular three-party coalition, took 120 seats, its worst result since the end of World World II.

The Greens won 85 seats, followed by the democratic socialist Die Linke, or The Left, with 64 seats and left-wing populist Bundnis Sahra Wagenknecht (BSW) with one seat.

The pro-business Free Democratic Party, a member of the outgoing coalition that has traditionally alternated between partnering with the CDU–CSU alliance and SDP, failed to win a seat after falling short of the 5 per cent mark to enter the 630-member Bundestag, the German parliament. —*Agencies*

JOURNEY SO FAR: FRIEDRICH MERZ

- **BORN:** 11 November, 1955, Brilon, West Germany
- Law degree from the University of Bonn
- Worked as a judge and corporate lawyer

POLITICAL CAREER

- Joined Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the 1980s
- Elected to the European Parliament (1989) and Bundestag (1994)
- CDU parliamentary leader (2000–2002)
- Left politics in 2009 for a finance career
- Re-entered politics in 2018, lost initial CDU leadership bid
- Became CDU leader in 2022
- Supports tax cuts, deregulation, and stronger global leadership
- Advocates stricter immigration and asylum policies

PERSONAL LIFE

- Married to Charlotte Merz, with three children
- Interests: Aviation and business

Outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz PHOTO: X

Govt formation to be a tough task for Merz

BERLIN, 24 FEB

Germany faces its second change of leader in fewer than four years after the head of the centre-right opposition, Friedrich Merz, won Sunday's election.

After the collapse of outgoing Chancellor Olaf Scholz's three-party government in November, it's now up to Merz to restore stability to the European Union's most populous country and traditional political heavyweight, which also has the continent's biggest economy.

Merz has one realistic option to form a government – a coalition with Scholz's Social Democrats. His Union bloc and its centre-left rival have a combined 328 seats in the 630-seat parliament.

He says he hopes to do the deal by Easter. That's a challenging timeframe – the possible partners will have to reconcile contrasting proposals for revitalising the economy, which has shrunk for the past two years, and for curbing irregular migration, an issue that Merz pushed hard during the campaign. That will likely require diplomacy and a readiness to compromise that often weren't evident in recent weeks.

It's still a much easier task than it might have been. For hours on Sunday night, it looked likely that Merz would need a second centre-left partner, the environmentalist Greens, to put together a parliamentary majority.

The Union and Social Democrats were post-World War II Germany's heavyweights. But their support has been eroding for at least two decades as the political landscape has become more fragmented. Their combined showing Sunday was their weakest since the postwar federal republic was founded in 1949. —*PTI*

Merz's Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union alliance won 208 seats with 28.6 percent of the vote in Sunday's election PHOTO: X

> **Much like the USA, the people of Germany got tired of the no common sense agenda. Congratulations to Friedrich Merz on this decisive victory**
> —Donald Trump, US President

> **I extend my congratulations to Friedrich Merz. In this period of uncertainty, we are united to face the great challenges of the world and our continent**
> Emmanuel Macron, France President

Congratulations to Friedrich Merz. I look forward to working together to deepen UK-Germany relations
—Keir Starmer, UK PM

Congratulations to Friedrich Merz. I look forward to working together to protect lives, bring peace to Ukraine, and strengthen Europe
—Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukraine President

Warm congratulations to Friedrich Merz. Europe needs shared successes, and those successes will bring even greater unity to Europe
—Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel PM

Congratulations, Friedrich Merz on your victory. It's vital that Europe step up on defence spending, and your leadership will be key
—Mark Rutte, Secretary General NATO

Alice Weidel, co-leader of Alternative for Germany, celebrates early results in the election PHOTO: EPA

PHOTO: PTI

Pope had good tenth night in hospital: Vatican

ROME, 24 FEB

Pope Francis was resting on Monday morning after a quiet night on the 10th day of his hospitalisation for a complex lung infection that has provoked the early stages of kidney insufficiency, the Vatican said. Late Sunday, doctors reported that blood tests showed "early, slight kidney insufficiency" that was nevertheless under control. They said Francis remained in critical condition but that he hadn't experienced any further respiratory crises since Saturday. He was receiving high flows of supplemental oxygen and, on Sunday, was alert and responsive. They said his prognosis was guarded. Doctors said Francis' condition is touch-and-go, given his age, fragility and pre-existing lung disease. —*PTI*

Security forces kill seven terrorists in northwest Pakistan

PESHAWAR, 24 FEB

Pakistani security forces killed seven terrorists in two separate operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the terrorists. On Friday, the security forces killed six terrorists during an intelligence-based operation in the Karak district. The Inter-Service Public Relations of the Pakistan Armed Forces said the operations were launched as they "were determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country". Pakistan has been grappling with a surge in terrorist attacks, particularly targeting law enforcement and security forces in the border provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan since the Taliban regained power in Afghanistan in 2021. The country witnessed a sharp increase in terror attacks in January 2025. —*PTI*

Foreign leaders visit Ukraine on third anniversary of war

KYIV, 24 FEB

A dozen leaders from Europe and Canada visited Ukraine's capital on Monday to mark the third anniversary of Russia's invasion in a show of support for Kyiv by some of the nation at war's most important backers.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau were among the visitors greeted at the train station by Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha and the president's chief of staff Andrii Yermak.

In a post on X, von der Leyen wrote that Europe was in Kyiv "because Ukraine is in Europe".

"In this fight for survival, it is not only the destiny of Ukraine that is at stake. It's Europe's destiny," she wrote.

The guests, also including European Council President Antonio Costa and prime ministers of Northern European countries and Spain, were set to attend events dedicated to the anniversary and discuss supporting Ukraine with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy amid a recent US policy shift under President Donald Trump. —*PTI*

US aid to Ukraine was grants, not loans: Zelenskyy

The US aid to Ukraine was provided as grants, not loans, said President Zelenskyy, rejecting claims that USD 500B in assistance should be treated as debt. US gave Kyiv USD 100B in aid during three years of war, he said, adding that they need to sign an agreement that will be a "win-win" for both the US and Ukraine. —*Agencies*

People rally on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Sunday to mark the 3rd anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine PHOTO: PTI

WAR ON SPENDING

Trump admin sends USAID staff on leave

WASHINGTON DC, 24 FEB

The Trump administration on Sunday said that it was placing all but a fraction of staffers at the US Agency for International Development (USAID) worldwide on leave and eliminating at least 1,600 US-based jobs.

The move was the latest and one of the biggest steps yet toward what President Donald Trump and cost-cutting ally Elon Musk say is their goal of gutting the six-decade-old agency to slash federal spending.

The move comes after a federal judge on Friday allowed the administration to move forward with its plan to pull thousands of USAID staffers off the job in the US and around the world. USAID did not respond to messages seeking comment. —*PTI*

Donald Trump PHOTO: PTI

Federal workers scramble as Musk's deadline draws closer

WASHINGTON, 24 FEB

Confusion and chaos loom as hundreds of thousands of federal employees begin their workweek on Monday facing a deadline from President Donald Trump's cost-cutting chief, Elon Musk, to explain their recent accomplishments or risk losing their jobs.

Lawmakers in both parties said that Musk's mandate may be illegal, while unions are threatening to sue.

One message on Sunday morning from the Department of Health and Human Services, led by Robert F Kennedy Jr., instructed its roughly 80,000 employees to comply.

That was shortly after the acting general counsel, Sean Keveney, had instructed some not to. And by Sunday evening, agency leadership issued new instructions that employees should "pause activities" related to the request until noon on Monday.

FBI Director Kash Patel, an outspoken Trump ally, has also instructed the agency's employees to ignore Musk's request, at least for now. —*PTI*

Vivek Ramaswamy set to join race for Ohio Guv

COLUMBUS, 24 FEB

Vivek Ramaswamy, the Cincinnati-born biotech entrepreneur who departed the Department of Government Efficiency initiative on President Donald Trump's first day, was expected to launch his bid for Ohio governor Monday.

Ramaswamy, 39, is set to kick off his campaign in Cincinnati, joining the 2026 Republican primary just a month after presumed frontrunner and then-Lt. Gov. Jon Husted left the race to take a US Senate post.

Ramaswamy joins a competitive GOP primary field to succeed Republican Gov. Mike DeWine, 78, a veteran centre-right politician.

Ramaswamy, a Hindu, outlined the 10 core beliefs featured in his presidential campaign – led by "God is real" followed by "there are two genders" – in the 2024 book, "Truths: The Future of America First."

He seeks to buck the traditional route to Ohio's governorship, which runs through extensive government service, and instead mount a Trump-style ascent into the job directly from the business world. —*PTI*

CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR RACE

Election: 3 NOV, 2026
Leading candidates

- Chad Bianco (Republican)
- Antonio Villaraigosa
- Eleni Kounalakis
- Toni Atkins
- Tony Thurmond

Potential contender: Kamala Harris

- No official announcement yet
- Leads early polls with 57% support
- Speculation over a governor run vs. a 2028 presidential bid

Key issues

- Public safety, housing crisis, climate action, education reform

Trump to meet French, UK leaders

WASHINGTON DC, 24 FEB

President Trump will hold talks this week with French President Macron and British PM Starmer at a moment of deep uncertainty about the future of transatlantic relations, with Trump transforming American foreign policy and effectively tuning out European leadership as he looks to quickly end Russia's war in Ukraine.

Trump also has made demands for territory, as well as rare earth minerals from Ukraine. —*PTI*

SETBACK TO MILITANTS

Sudan's military breaks RSF siege on Obeid

CAIRO, 24 FEB

Sudan's military broke a more than yearlong siege on the crucial city of Obeid, restoring access to a strategic area in the south-central region and strengthening crucial supply routes in its nearly two years of war against the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The military also kicked the RSF from its last stronghold in the White Nile province in another setback to the notorious group on Sunday, military spokesman Brig. Gen. Nabil Abdullah said in a statement.

Abdullah, the spokesman, said military troops in the al-Sayyad axis managed to reopen the road to the city of Obeid and break the RSF siege on the city which serves as the provincial capital of North Kordofan province.

A commercial and transportation hub, the city hosts a sprawling airbase and has a railway linking Khartoum to Nyala, the provincial capital of South Darfur province. Obeid was besieged by the RSF since the onset of the ongoing conflict in April 2023.

Sunday's RSF defeats were the latest in a series of setbacks for the notorious group that started in September when the military launched an offensive aiming at recapturing the Great Khartoum area — Khartoum and its two sister cities of Omdurman and Khartoum North, or Bahri.

The fighting, which wrecked the capital, Khartoum, and other urban areas has been marked by atrocities including mass rape and ethnically motivated killings amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to the United Nations and international rights groups. International mediation attempts and pressure tactics, including a US assessment that the RSF and its proxies are committing genocide, have not halted the conflict. —*PTI*

Miscreants attack air base in B'desh, 1 killed

DHAKA, 24 FEB

One person died after a group of miscreants attacked the Air Force base in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar on Monday, The Daily Star reported.

The deceased has been identified by his family members as Shihab Kabir Nahid, 25, from Samitipara.

Resident medical officer of Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital, Sabuktagin Mahmud Shohel, said he was brought dead to the hospital, according to a report in the Daily Star Bangladesh.

Shohel said the victim had suffered deep injuries at the back of his head and the reason behind his death will be ascertained only after the autopsy report arrived.

In a press release issued on Monday, Inter-Services Public Relations of the Bangladesh armed forces Assistant Director Ayesha Siddiqua said that the air force was taking necessary actions in this regard. —*ANI*

Sensex sinks below 75K mark on weak US mkts; investors lose ₹4.2L cr

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

Falling for the fifth day in a row on Monday, equity benchmark BSE Sensex tumbled over 1 per cent to drop below the crucial 75,000 level, tracking a US market trend and unabated foreign fund outflows amid concerns over US tariffs.

The Sensex fall also left investors poorer by Rs 4.22 lakh crore. In the previous five trading sessions, investors' wealth eroded by Rs 2.34 lakh crore, which is less than Monday's loss of Rs 4.22 lakh crore.

The 30-share BSE benchmark tanked 856.65 points or 1.14 per cent to settle at 74,454.41. During the day, it plummeted 923.62 points or 1.22 per cent to 74,387.44.

The NSE Nifty dropped 242.55 points or 1.06 per cent to 22,553.35.

In the last five trading sessions, the BSE barometer lost 1,542.45 points or 2 per cent, and the Nifty tanked 406.15 points or 1.76 per cent.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech, Zomato, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Tata Steel and NTPC were among the biggest laggards.

- Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth Rs 3,449.15 crore on Friday. They have pulled out over Rs 23,710 crore from equity markets so far this month

In contrast, Mahindra & Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Maruti, Nestle and ITC were among the gainers.

Information technology stocks took a tumble during the morning session as concerns surrounding USA's stuttering economy caused a sharp sell-off. Domestic IT firms that are reliant on services exports to the USA bore the highest brunt of the losses.

Nifty IT index sank 2.5 percent, making it the top sectoral loser. All ten index constituents were trading in the deep red, with L&T Technology Services and Persistent Systems leading the losses, cracking up to 5.5 per cent.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,449.15 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Foreign investors have pulled out over Rs 23,710 crore from equity markets so far this month, pushing total outflows past Rs 1 lakh crore in 2025 amid rising global trade tensions.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Equity markets were closed in Tokyo for a holiday.

European markets were trading mostly in positive territory. US markets ended significantly lower on Friday.

The BSE smallcap gauge declined 1.31 per cent, and the midcap index dipped 0.78 per cent. *—PTI*

The BSE benchmark plummeted 923.62 points **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

PHOTO:ANI

Gold rises ₹350 per 10g to reclaim ₹89,000-mark

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Gold prices rose Rs 350 to trade near a record high at Rs 89,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid firm global trends, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 88,750 per 10 grams on Friday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity increased Rs 350 to Rs 88,700 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 88,350 per 10 grams. Last week, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity hit fresh peaks of Rs 89,450 and Rs 89,050 per 10 grams, respectively. However, silver traded flat at Rs 1 lakh per kg. Meanwhile, in futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery appreciated Rs 118 to Rs 86,128 per 10 grams. On the other hand, silver futures in the Asian market hours quoted 0.43 per cent lower at USD 33.20 per ounce. *—PTI*

Rupee down 4p to close at 86.72 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

The rupee dropped 4 paise to 86.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid a steep fall in the domestic equity markets and a rise in Brent crude prices. However, a flat greenback against major currencies prevented further decline in the domestic unit, according to forex traders. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 86.58, went up 10 paise from Friday's close of 86.68, but gave way through the session. It eventually settled at 86.72 (provisional), 4 paise lower than the previous day's close. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading flat at 106.61. *—PTI*

Samsung, labour union agree on 5% raise in S Korea

SOUTH KOREA, 24 FEB

Samsung Electronics Co. and its largest labour union have tentatively agreed to a 5.1 per cent wage increase and stock awards for employees in 2025, aiming to ease tensions after the company's first-ever labour strike last year. The deal includes 30 company shares for each employee, valued at about $1,200, and a discount on Samsung products worth 2 million won ($1,400). Additionally, Samsung will rehire retirees with three or more children to address South Korea's declining birth rate. The National Samsung Electronics Union, representing 37,000 members, will vote on the agreement from 28 Feb to 5 March. This move comes as Samsung faces increasing competition from SK Hynix Inc. in memory chips and Chinese rivals in consumer electronics. *—Agencies*

MP can be ₹249L cr economy by 2047: CII

Report says state can increase its contribution to India's GDP from 4.6% to 6% by 2047–48

BHOPAL, 24 FEB

Madhya Pradesh can potentially increase the size of its economy by 18 times to Rs 248.6 lakh crore by 2047–48, said a report by industry body CII. In order to realise its potential, the state needs to focus on boosting the manufacturing industry and industrial expansion must take centre stage, it said.

According to the report, Envisioning Madhya Pradesh Economy@2047, the gross state domestic product (GSDP) of the state can rise to Rs 248.6 lakh crore by 2047–48, growing at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 8.6 per cent, from the current Rs 13.6 lakh crore.

With a proactive state government dedicated to boosting investment and driving growth, Madhya Pradesh is well-placed to increase its contribution to India's GDP from the current 4.6 per cent to 6.0 per cent by 2047–48, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said.

While agriculture sector currently contributes 43 per cent to the state's economy, the share of manufacturing must rise from 7.2 per cent to 22.2 per cent by 2047 to sustain long-term growth, the report said.

To achieve this, the report outlined strategic interventions, categorised into horizontal (cross-sectoral) and vertical (sector-specific) approaches.

Meanwhile, Madhya Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Department (MPNRED) Additional Chief Secretary Manu Srivastava said the state has made investments in all ends of the energy spectrum, enabling it to end scheduled power cuts. It is now planning to supply power to farmers during the day, he said.

"We used to have these power cuts around 2012 or 2013. Then, we started Atal Vidyut Yojna. The power supply has been increasing continuously thereafter," he said.

Srivastava has invited private players to invest in the state as it accelerated renewable energy projects. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Madhya Pradesh Governor Mangubhai C Patel and Chief Minister Mohan Yadav during the Global Investors Summit 2025 in Bhopal **PHOTO: PTI**

It's time to invest in MP, says PM

BHOPAL, 24 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday said that with a strong talent pool and thriving industries, Madhya Pradesh is becoming a preferred business destination and that this is the time, and right time, to invest in the state.

"For the first time in the history of Bharat, there is an occasion when the whole world is so optimistic about it," Modi said after inaugurating the mega Invest Madhya Pradesh – Global Investors Summit 2025 in Bhopal.

The commoners and economists, countries and institutions worldwide are optimistic about Bharat and have great expectations from the country, he said at the summit.

"The world's future is in India." Such comments in the past weeks have bolstered the zeal of investors, he said.

Modi said the World Bank has expressed confidence that India will continue to be the world's fastest growing economy in the coming years.

He also said the Deregulation Commission will help create investment-friendly regulatory ecosystem in states.

A UN organisation on climate change has said Bharat is a "superpower of solar power" and that while many countries only talk, India shows results, Modi said.

India is emerging as the top supply chain for global aerospace firms. Textile, tourism and technology sectors will generate crores of jobs in the years to come, he said.

"I can quote and give many instances of the world's confidence in Bharat," and such statements boost the confidence of states, he said.

"India's energy sector brought unprecedented growth, especially in green energy. Bharat has done what was unimaginable," Modi said. *—PTI*

EFTA nations to invest $100B in India

BHOPAL, 24 FEB

Switzerland and other European Free Trade Association (EFTA) nations are set to invest USD 100B in India over the next 15 years, according to Martin U Maier, Consul General of Switzerland in Mumbai. Speaking exclusively to ANI on the sidelines of the Global Investors Summit in Bhopal, Maier highlighted that the commitment is part of the recently signed Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement between India and EFTA nations. One of the key chapters of the agreement outlines this substantial investment aimed at enhancing economic collaboration between India and the EFTA bloc. Switzerland, together with the other EFTA countries, signed trade agreements with India, one of which contains a USD 100B investment, he said. *—ANI*

TOP COS PLEDGE ₹4 LAKH CR INVESTMENT IN MP

BHOPAL, 24 FEB

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group, **Reliance Industries Ltd** and state-owned power producer **NTPC** were among over a dozen companies that on Monday committed to investing about Rs 4 lakh crore across businesses in Madhya Pradesh.

Speaking at the Invest Madhya Pradesh, Adani promised Rs 1.1 lakh crore in pumped storage, cement, mining, smart-meters and thermal energy and Rs 1 lakh crore in a greenfield smart city, an airport project and a coal-gasification project.

Reliance committed Rs 60,000 crore to set up biofuel projects in the state.

NTPC, its subsidiaries and joint venture partners will invest Rs 1.2 lakh crore in setting up a 2GW renewable power generation facility, besides pumping in another Rs 80,000 crore in nuclear power plants in the state.

Avaada, a renewable energy player, is planning to invest Rs 50,000 crore in next five years in setting up solar, wind and pump hydro storage, battery storage projects and solar photovoltaic module manufacturing facility, its MD Vineet Mittal said.

Torrent Power committed Rs 26,500 crore for renewable energy.

Power Finance Corporation and **Rural Electrification Corporation** committed Rs 26,800 crore and Rs 21,000 crore of lending support, respectively, to projects coming up in the state.

Hindalco promised 15,000 crore investment in the next two years.

OPG Power Generation also pledged a Rs 13,400 crore battery storage system manufacturing facility, small modular reactors, green hydrogen and hybrid power generation. *—PTI*

India among top three US tariff targets: S&P

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

S&P Global Ratings on Monday said several Asia-Pacific economies could face higher tariffs under the Trump administration, while India, South Korea and Thailand could be most vulnerable to trade retaliation.

In its report titled 'Asia-Pacific Economies Likely To Be Hit By US Trade Tariffs', S&P said economies like Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, and South Korea have relatively greater economic exposure to the US, meaning that tariffs, if imposed, would have the largest economic impact.

"India and Japan have more domestically oriented economies that will provide some mitigation from tariffs," S&P said.

The new US administration has already enacted additional 10 per cent tariffs on imports from China and 25 per cent tariffs on steel and aluminum.

"We believe this might not be the end of it. Uncertainty is high because of the high leeway the US administration gives itself in imposing trade tariffs on partner economies, and bilateral negotiations can impact outcomes as well," S&P said. *—PTI*

8% revenue boost likely for India Inc

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Domestic rating agency ICRA on Monday said Indian companies are likely to clock 7–8 per cent revenue growth during the March quarter of the current fiscal year, led by revival in rural demand and uptick in government spending.

ICRA expects the private capital expenditure (capex) cycle to remain measured in view of the uncertainties around geopolitical developments and relatively subdued outlook on merchandise exports from India.

Nonetheless, certain sunrise sectors such as electronics, semiconductors and niche segments within the automotive space like electric vehicles will continue to see a scale-up in investments, in line with various production-linked incentive programmes announced by the Government of India, it said.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

- Certain sunrise sectors such as electronics, semiconductors and niche segments within the automotive space like electric vehicles will continue to see a scale-up in investments, in line with various incentives announced by the Government of India

ICRA said the recovery in the operating profit margins for India Inc witnessed over the past quarter is likely to be sustained at 18.2–18.4 per cent, supported by an increase in demand, led by improved consumer sentiments.

"Rural demand is expected to be upbeat in H1 CY2025 (January–March), aided by the robust output for most kharif crops and the favourable outlook for the ongoing rabi season. Beyond that, a normal and well distributed monsoon in 2025 is crucial to support the agricultural outcomes," said Kinjal Shah, Senior Vice President & Co-Group Head, Corporate Ratings, ICRA.

Urban demand, which has been sluggish over the last few quarters, is expected to improve, aided by the sizeable income-tax relief in the Union Budget 2025, the monetary easing by the Reserve Bank of India and the expectations of a moderation in food inflation, Shah added. *—PTI*

SC DEADLINE EXPIRES

NCLAT delay puts Coffee Day back into insolvency process

NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

Insolvency process against Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd (CDEL), which owns the Cafe Coffee Day chain, has resumed as appellate tribunal NCLAT could not pass the order within the specified deadline of 21 February, set by the Supreme Court.

Last week, the Chennai bench of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) completed the hearing and reserved its order over the appeal filed by the director of its suspended board, CDEL informed through a regulatory filing.

"Since the appeal has not been disposed of until 21 February as instructed by the Supreme Court, the order passed by NCLAT regarding the stay on the CIRP of the Corporate Debtor stands vacated," it said, adding, "However, the order has been reserved by NCLAT, and yet to be pronounced."

PHOTO:X

On 8 August, the Bengaluru bench of the NCLT (National Company Law Tribunal) admitted a plea filed by IDBI Trusteeship Services Ltd claiming a default of Rs 228.45 crore and appointed an interim resolution professional to take care of the operation of the debt-ridden company.

The suspended board challenged this before NCLAT, which on 14 August, 2024, stayed the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process initiated against CDEL by NCLT.

However, this was challenged by IDBITSL before the Supreme Court, which had on 31 January, 2025 directed the Chennai bench of NCLAT to dispose of the appeal pending before it before 21 February, 2025. *—PTI*

Amgen plans $200M boost for new Hyd facility

HYDERABAD, 24 FEB

US biopharma major Amgen is investing USD 200M this year in its new facility in Hyderabad and plans to make significant investments in the coming years, CEO Robert Bradway said on Monday. He was speaking at the inauguration of the facility by Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy.

In his address, Reddy highlighted the state government's vision of transforming into a USD 1tn economy and positioning itself as "China Plus One destination".

Recalling his visit to Amgen's R&D Centre in the US, he said he saw the company's "great commitment to scientific innovation, transforming lives through research, innovation" in medicines and biotechnology. *—PTI*

Indian tech sector grows 5.1% in FY25

MUMBAI, 24 FEB

IT industry body Nasscom on Monday pegged the FY25 revenues for the sector to grow 5.1 per cent to USD 282.6B.

The industry is likely to cross USD 300B in revenues in FY26, which is about 6 per cent higher than the FY25 level, its President Rajesh Nambiar said at the Nasscom Technology Leadership Forum here.

"This is a good outcome broadly given everything happening around us," Nambiar said.

The number of people employed by the tech sector grew by 1.26 lakh to 58 lakh during the year, Nasscom projections said.

The traditional IT services companies' FY25 revenues are set to grow 4.3 per cent to USD 137.1B, while the business process outsourcing revenues are set to rise 4.7 per cent to USD 54.6B.

PHOTO:X

At 7 per cent, revenue growth of engineering research and development companies was the fastest at USD 55.6B.

The domestic revenues for companies are set to grow 7 per cent to USD 58.2B, growing faster than the 4.6 per cent growth in export revenues which are likely to come at USD 224.4B. *—PTI*

Services clinch 71st National Men's Kabaddi C'ship

CUTTACK, 24 FEB

Services emerged victorious in a nail-biting finale against Railways to claim the 71st Senior National Men's Kabaddi Championship at the Jawaharlal Nehru Indoor Stadium in Cuttack on Sunday. The team with immense star-power prevailed 30-30 (6-4) in a tie-breaker, showcasing remarkable composure when it mattered most as the clash could have gone either way, as per a PKL press release. Led by Pro Kabaddi League star Naveen Kumar, Services demonstrated exceptional skill throughout the tournament. The final was a star-studded affair featuring some of India's top talents, including Railways' dynamic raider Pankaj Mohite and Parvesh Bhainswal. —*ANI*

WPL: Delhi Capitals, Gujarat Giants eye batting effort

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

Struggling with batting frailties, Gujarat Giants and Delhi Capitals will look to return to winning ways when they clash in the Women's Premier League here on Tuesday. Both teams head into this fixture on the back of defeats. Gujarat Giants, who finished last in the previous two seasons, remain at the bottom of the points table with just one win in three games. Meanwhile, Delhi Capitals have slipped to third after a 33-run loss to UP Warriorz, their third defeat in five matches. Despite being one of the most consistent teams since the league's inception, Delhi Capitals have endured a patchy run this season. They are yet to live up to their pre-tournament favourites tag, struggling to put together commanding performances. —*PTI*

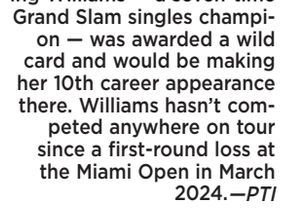


PHOTO: ANI

Venus Williams won't play at Indian Wells

INDIAN WELLS, 24 FEB

It turns out 44-year-old Venus Williams will not be playing at the BNP Paribas Open, the tournament revealed — days after it announced she would be competing there with a wild-card entry. "Our team has been informed that Venus is not accepting the wild card this year," the event posted on social media, saying it was a message from Indian Wells tournament director Tommy Haas. "We wish Venus all the best and hope to see her back in Indian Wells in the future." On Wednesday, the BNP Paribas Open issued a press release saying Williams — a seven-time Grand Slam singles champion — was awarded a wild card and would be making her 10th career appearance there. Williams hasn't competed anywhere on tour since a first-round loss at the Miami Open in March 2024.—*PTI*

Impressive Bayern beats Frankfurt 4-0 in Bundesliga

BERLIN, 24 FEB

Bayern Munich substitute Serge Gnabry grabbed a late goal to cap a 4-0 win over third-placed Eintracht Frankfurt that consolidated the Bavarian powerhouse's Bundesliga lead. Gnabry fired the ball through Frankfurt goalkeeper Kevin Trapp's legs in the second minute of stoppage time, almost 10 minutes after Jamal Musiala ran past a host of defenders and got a fortunate bounce of the ball before firing it past Trapp for Bayern's third goal. Without top scorer Harry Kane, who only played the final half hour or so, Bayern stayed eight points clear of defending champion Bayer Leverkusen with 11 rounds remaining. Both Stuttgart and Leipzig drew their games on Sunday, denting their hopes of qualifying for Europe's top club competition.—*PTI*

Kohli: Cover-drive a 'catch-22' weakness

India-Pak game is always a blockbuster, but Kohli says Sunday's clash was even more electrifying

DUBAI, 24 FEB

Indian batting maestro Virat Kohli admitted that his trademark cover drive puts him in a "catch-22" situation as it has been a weakness lately but playing the shot gives him control over the innings.

Kohli crafted a memorable unbeaten century against Pakistan, steering India to a six-wicket win. His 111-ball masterclass featured the cover drive prominently, a shot that has in recent time led to his downfall but remains a signature weapon in his arsenal.

"It's a 'catch-22'. I mean, it's (cover drive) kind of been my weakness as well over the years, but I've scored a lot of runs on that shot," Kohli said in a video posted by BCCI.

An India-Pakistan game is always a blockbuster, but Kohli felt Sunday's clash was even more electrifying, with Dubai's stands packed with passionate fans from both nations.

Kohli said his role at No. 3 has remained unchanged over the years -- minimising risk, stabilising the innings, and, when possible, finishing the chase. —*PTI*

Virat Kohli and Shreyas during ICC Champions Trophy between India and Pakistan, at Dubai International Cricket Stadium, in Dubai **PHOTO: PTI**

> **Gill is going to shoulder responsibility of Indian team in years to come**
>
> -Sanjay Bangar, former player

> **I was doing maths for Kohli's century**
>
> -Axar Patel

> **Kohinoor Kohli will play for next 2-3 years and score another 10 to 15 tons**
>
> -Navjot Singh Sidhu, ex-cricketer

> **Our Champions Trophy campaign as good as over**
>
> -Mohammad Rizwan, Pakistan captain

Nobody can handle pressure like Kohli: BCCI & IPL top brass

DUBAI, 24 FEB

Virat Kohli provides unmatched stability to the Indian team, according to former Sports Minister Anurag Thakur and BCCI Vice President Rajeev Shukla, who felt the superstar batter displayed exceptional composure under pressure during his century against Pakistan. Kohli's majestic unbeaten century was the backbone of India's six-wicket victory over Pakistan in the Champions Trophy. "Virat Kohli has shown how to handle the pressure and how to play for the country. Through his outstanding innings, Virat has won many hearts and the match for the country," former BCCI President Thakur told PTI. "The entire country was waiting for Virat to score a century. The way he played today, it was a fantastic innings to watch," IPL Chairman Arun Dhumal said. —*PTI*

CHAMPIONS ICC
Australia vs South Africa
at 2.30pm IST

AKHTAR SLAMS PAK'S 'BRAINLESS' MANAGEMENT

DUBAI, 24 FEB

Pace legend Shoaib Akhtar didn't pull any punches as he blasted Pakistan's "brainless, and clueless" team management following the six-wicket loss to India in the Champions Trophy, saying the side entered the tournament without any "clear direction".

Pakistan suffered their second consecutive loss in the event on Sunday. They had lost to New Zealand in the opener and their chances of advancing are now hanging by a thread.

"I am not disappointed at all (by the defeat to India) because I knew what would happen," Akhtar said in a short video on his X account.

"You can't select five bowlers? the whole world is playing six bowlers... you go with two all-rounders, this is just brainless and clueless management."

The former pacer also questioned the Pakistan players' intent and skills. —*PTI*

NZ beat B'desh, qualify for CT semifinals

RAWALPINDI, 24 FEB

New Zealand beat Bangladesh by five wickets in a Champions Trophy Group A match here on Monday, a result which sent the Kiwis as well as India into the Champions Trophy semifinals.

New Zealand's win meant that Bangladesh and hosts Pakistan, who have lost both their two matches so far, were knocked out of the tournament.

India and New Zealand have four points each from two wins so far in Group A. Top two teams from each group qualify for the semifinals.

Rachin Ravindra (112) struck a magnificent century as New Zealand chased down the target of 237 with 23 balls to spare.

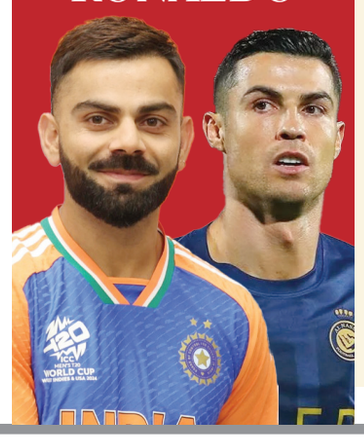
Tom Latham and Devon Conway chipped in with 55 and 30 respectively as New Zealand reached 240 for 5 in 46.1 overs.

Earlier, Michael Bracewell bagged four wickets as New Zealand restricted Bangladesh to a modest 236 for 9 despite skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto's 77.

Bracewell accounted for Tanzid Hasan (24), Mushfiqur Rahim (2), Mahmudullah (4) and Bangladesh's last match centurion Towhid Hridoy (7) to return with impactful figures of 10-0-26-4. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

FIFA CALLS KOHLI 'KING', COMPARES HIM WITH RONALDO



NEW DELHI, 24 FEB

In a historic victory at the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, India defeated Pakistan, with Virat Kohli stealing the spotlight by scoring his 51st ODI century.

Kohli's stellar performance was celebrated not only in India but worldwide.

The FIFA World Cup's official Instagram account acknowledged Kohli's achievement by comparing him to Portuguese football legend Cristiano Ronaldo.

Posting pictures of both sports icons with the caption "Kings," FIFA drew parallels between the two global superstars. Fans flooded the comments with praise and excitement over the comparison. Kohli, known for his love of European football, is a devoted supporter of German football.

Notably, Ronaldo is his favorite footballer, and Kohli's support shifted to Manchester City after Ronaldo's unexpected exit from Manchester United. —*PTI*

- Kohli, known for his love of European football, is a devoted supporter of German football. Notably, Ronaldo is his favorite footballer

AHEAD OF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

PSG dominates France, to face Liverpool next

PARIS, 24 FEB

Paris Saint-Germain has no serious rival in France this season and will soon find out if its crushing domestic dominance can translate into the team thriving on European soccer's biggest stage.

Still unbeaten in the French league after 23 matches, PSG extended its massive lead at the top of the standings to 13 points on Sunday with a 3-2 win at sixth-placed Lyon.

There appears little doubt that PSG will win a record-extending 13th league title this season. But a far tougher test looms in March against Premier League leader Liverpool when the two teams face off in a mouthwatering last-16 Champions League tie. The first leg is in Paris on 5 March.

The match came to life after the interval and featured inspired attacking moves from both sides. PSG was the better side and led 2-0 with seven minutes left to play.

It's the next big hurdle on the road that separates PSG from their ultimate goal of winning the Champions League, a task that has proved too difficult so far despite the millions injected by Qatari investors since 2011.

The only French club to win the Champions League, second-placed Marseille, made headlines for the wrong reason this weekend. It lost 3-0 at Auxerre, and its president accused French league referees of corruption. —*PTI*

Napoli's winless streak reaches 4 matches in Italian League

ROME, 24 FEB

Napoli's winless streak reached four matches with a 2-1 loss at promoted Como in the Italian League.

Amir Rrahmani set the tone of the match for Napoli with an own-goal seven minutes in. Giacomo Raspadori equalised for Napoli 10 minutes later but 19-year-old Spanish winger Assane Diao won it for Como after being set up by Nico Paz late in the second half.

Antonio Conte's Napoli had a chance to reclaim the Serie A lead from defending champion Inter Milan, which moved ahead by beating Genoa on Saturday, but will instead be in second for a matchup with Inter next weekend.

Third-placed Atalanta bounced back from a Champions League exit with a 5-0 rout at Empoli that was helped by a brace from Ademola Lookman.

Mateo Retegui and Davide Zappacosta also scored for Atalanta, which took the lead with an own-goal from Emmanuel Gyasi.

Atalanta moved within three points of the top of the league.

Fourth-placed Juventus won 1-0 at Cagliari with an early goal from Dusan Vlahovic after it, too, was eliminated from the Champions League.

Also, Hellas Verona beat Fiorentina 1-0 with a goal five minutes into second-half injury time from Antoine Bernede.

Fiorentina striker Moise Kean was diagnosed with a head injury after collapsing on the field during the second half. —*PTI*

Napoli's winless streak reached four matches with a 2-1 loss at promoted Como in the Italian League **PHOTO: PTI**

- Third-placed Atalanta bounced back from a Champions League exit with a 5-0 rout at Empoli that was helped by a brace from Ademola Lookman

BENGALURU FC EYE WIN AGAINST CHENNAIYIN FC

BENGALURU, 24 FEB

A play-offs spot at stake, Bengaluru FC will bank on their impressive home record when they host their southern neighbours Chennaiyin FC in an Indian Super League (ISL) match here on Tuesday.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant have already clinched the ISL Shield on Sunday with three rounds of matches remaining, thereby earning a berth in the AFC Champions League 2, but the trophy is still up for grabs.

The top two teams at the end of the league will automatically qualify for the semifinals while the four teams from third to sixth will play a single-leg round to fill up the remaining two spots.

Chennaiyin FC are eighth with 24 points, eight behind the sixth-placed Mumbai City FC (32), and they will want to keep their qualification hopes afloat with a positive outcome here. The two sides have played 16 matches against each other. —*PTI*

AFTER WIN AT MAN CITY

Liverpool marches toward League title

MANCHESTER, 24 FEB

Can anyone stop Liverpool's march toward the Premier League title?

Not Manchester City, that's for sure.

With a 2-0 win at the home of the four-time defending champion on Sunday, Liverpool produced a statement performance to move 11 points clear of Arsenal at the top of the standings.

"Special" was how Mohamed Salah described the latest victory that left the away fans chanting "We're gonna win the league" after the final whistle.

City manager Pep Guardiola, meanwhile, accepted the title was now Liverpool's to lose.

First-half goals from Salah and Dominik Szoboszlai put Arne Slot's team on course for a win that leaves it in command of the title race after 27 games. Liverpool is now 20 points above fourth-placed City after completing a league double over Guardiola's once all-conquering team.

This was City's eighth defeat in the league this season and 14th overall. The most games City had lost under Guardiola in any of his previous eight seasons was 12 in the 2019-20 campaign, which was the last time it failed to win the title.

City, meanwhile, faces a fight to secure a top-four finish and a return to next season's Champions League. It is above fifth-placed Newcastle on goal difference and just two points ahead of Aston Villa in eighth.

Arsenal's surprise 1-0 loss to West Ham on Saturday had given Liverpool the opportunity to strengthen its grip on the title race.

Another humbling defeat in an ever-worsening season for City.

Newcastle scored four goals in 11 minutes against Nottingham Forest, but still had to withstand a late fightback to seal a 4-3 win. —*PTI*

This was City's 8th defeat in league this season and 14th overall **PHOTO: X**

Spanish league: Madrid level with Barca after Modric's goal

MADRID, 24 FEB

Luka Modric scored a beautiful long-range goal in Real Madrid's 2-0 home win against Girona that moved the defending champion level on points in the Spanish league with leader Barcelona.

The veteran midfielder chested the ball down in the 41st minute before firing a right-footed shot into the top corner.

"To score a goal like that, you have to keep shooting," Modric said. "I was by myself, controlled the ball, I struck it well and thank God it went in. It was a nice goal and it's always special to score at home in front of the fans at the Bernabeu."

Modric received a huge ovation from the crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

Modric made his ninth start in 25 league matches for Madrid in a season in which the 39-year-old has played few minutes off the bench. The former world player of the year scored his fourth goal this season with his neat strike to put Madrid ahead at the Bernabeu.

Forward Nico Williams scored a goal in each half as Athletic Bilbao trounced last-place Valladolid 7-1 at home.

Japan forward Takefusa Kubo scored a second-half goal as eighth-placed Real Sociedad comfortably beat Leganes 3-0 at home. —*PTI*

Luka Modric